

Dramatic Essays by  
John Forster  
George Henry Lewes

EDITED BY

WILLIAM ARCHER & ROBT. W. LOWE

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DRAMATIC ESSAYS.

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EDITED BY

WILLIAM ARCHER AND ROBERT W. LOWE.

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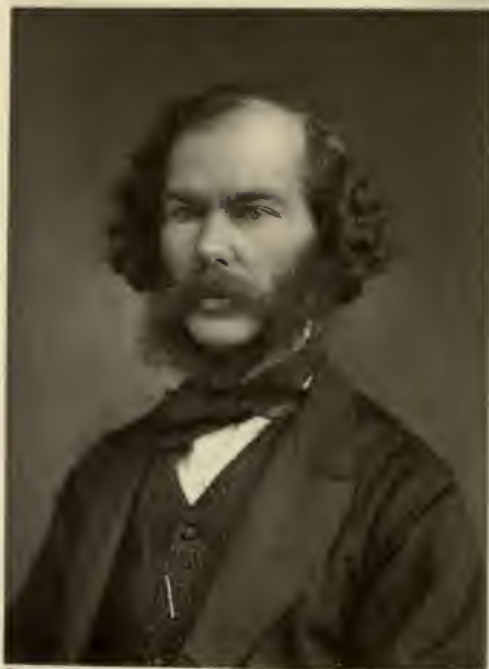


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GEORGE HENRY LEWES.

# DRAMATIC ESSAYS

JOHN FORSTER

GEORGE HENRY LEWES

REPRINTED FROM THE  
"EXAMINER" AND THE  
"LEADER," WITH NOTES  
AND AN INTRODUCTION  
BY WILLIAM ARCHER AND  
ROBERT W. LOWE

LONDON  
WALTER SCOTT, LIMITED  
PATERNOSTER SQ.

1896



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## INTRODUCTION.

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THE set of DRAMATIC ESSAYS completed in the present volume is designed to cover the history of the stage during the first half of the present century. Leigh Hunt's theatre-going began, as he tells us, in March 1800; the last of George Henry Lewes's criticisms reprinted in this volume dates from May 1854. In Leigh Hunt's early essays we have portraits of John and Charles Kemble, Mrs. Siddons, Mrs. Jordan, Elliston, Cooke, Munden, Liston—in short, the whole Kemble generation; while his later essays, from the *Tatler*, bring us into touch with the stage of the early 'thirties—Edmund Kean's last performances, Macready in his maturity, and Fanny Kemble. The gap between Leigh Hunt's two periods of dramatic criticism is filled in by Hazlitt, who, besides recording Kean's early triumphs, treats of Miss O'Neill, Macready's first appearances at Covent Garden, and the brief London career of the elder Booth. In the middle of the 'thirties, John Forster takes up the tale, and in his *Examiner* articles brings vividly before us the great achievements of Macready's management, and the performances of Edwin Forrest. Finally, George Henry Lewes, though his criticisms do not begin till 1850, deals mainly with the leading actors of the 'forties, Charles Kean and his wife, the Keeleys, Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris. In Lewes, too, we find evidence of that growing interest in, and dependence upon, the French stage which

was until quite recently so marked a feature in our theatrical life.

The essays of Leigh Hunt and Hazlitt, contained in the previous volumes, though long inaccessible to the general reader, had already appeared in book form (except Leigh Hunt's *Tatler* papers) and were well known to students of the stage. The criticisms which we here present have hitherto been inaccessible and unknown, except to the very few enthusiasts who have time and opportunity to wade through newspaper files. They are, in our judgment, no whit inferior in ability or interest to their predecessors, and we take pleasure in believing that this volume constitutes a substantial and valuable addition to the literature of the stage.

JOHN FORSTER was born in Newcastle-on-Tyne, April 2, 1812. He was educated at the expense of an uncle, who seems to have been a man of literary and theatrical tastes. At the age of fifteen (1827), Forster is said to have published in Newcastle a pamphlet entitled *A Few Thoughts in Vindication of the Stage*; but this I have been unable to procure. After a short stay at Cambridge he came to London, and was soon actively employed as a journalist. He became dramatic critic of the *True Sun* in 1832, and in 1833 joined the staff of the *Examiner*, then edited by Albany Fonblanque. It is not quite clear at what date he undertook the dramatic criticism of the paper. The first article here reprinted dates from the autumn of 1835. We might have included one or two earlier papers of considerable interest, had we been able to satisfy ourselves that they were written by Forster. The style seemed unmistakably his; but some allusions they contained led us at first to conclude that they must be the work of an older man. We are now inclined

to believe that we were mistaken. The question of evidence is sufficiently curious to justify a brief recital of the facts.

In the *Examiner* for June 8, 1834, there appears a mildly laudatory criticism of Macready's *Lear*, in which the writer observes: "We remember well the majesty of John Kemble." Now Forster was just five years and two months old when John Kemble made his last appearance on the stage, at Covent Garden, June 23, 1817; whence we assumed that this writer could not be he. On September 7th of the same year (1834) there appears a criticism containing the following sentence: "Mr. Kemble is represented (for we cannot speak with sufficient certainty from our own recollections) to have been a great ideal actor." A very severe criticism of Vandenhoff's *Brutus* (in Howard Payne's play) appears on November 16th, and in this there occur several allusions to Kemble which clearly imply that the writer has seen him. Finally, on December 14th of the same year, we find an attack on Vandenhoff's *Othello* and Denvil's *Iago*, professedly written by the same critic who had formerly dealt with Vandenhoff, and containing a description of one of the fine touches in Kean's *Othello*, which is repeated, almost word for word, in an article of October 25, 1835, indubitably written by Forster (see p. 14). Thus a complete chain seemed to link the unquestionable Forster of October 1835 to the writer of June 1834,<sup>1</sup> who "remembered the majesty of John Kemble," and therefore, we thought, could *not* be Forster. How was this contradiction to be reconciled?

"Here," we said to ourselves, "is a series of five articles, almost certainly written by the same man, and the writer

<sup>1</sup> This writer, it may be noted, condemned Macready's "excessive infirmity of deportment and articulation." We shall find Forster (p. 26) making precisely the same objection to Forrest's *Lear*.

of the fifth is quite certainly Forster. But in two of these articles it is explicitly stated, and in a third implied, that the writer remembers John Kemble, who retired from the stage at a time when Forster was a child of five, living in Newcastle. Of two improbabilities we must choose the less. It is, after all, not physically impossible that Forster may have seen and remembered John Kemble. We can more easily accept that hypothesis than assume a flaw in the evidence, external and internal, which assigns these five articles to the same pen." So cogent did this reasoning seem to us that we looked with confidence for circumstantial confirmation of it, and found it just where we expected—in the Newcastle playbills. We discovered that Newcastle was probably the last provincial town which John Kemble visited before his retirement. He played *Coriolanus* there on April 9 and 14, 1817, *Penruddock* on April 10, *Brutus* on April 11, and *Lear* on April 15, "being positively the last time of his ever performing on this stage." Forster was five years old on the 2nd of this very April; he was a precocious child, and it is certain that his attention was early directed to the theatre, since he not only wrote the before-mentioned pamphlet "in vindication of the stage" at the age of fifteen, but had a romantic play produced in the following year. The writer of the second of the five articles admits that he cannot "speak with certainty from his own recollections" of Kemble, implying that he saw him in his boyhood. Does it not seem probable that Forster's father or uncle may have taken the child to one or more of these farewell performances of the great tragedian? What the critic of 1834 professes to "remember well" is "the majesty of John Kemble," precisely what would impress itself on the memory of a child. And it is perhaps worth notice that this phrase occurs in an

article on Lear, the part in which Kemble made his very last appearance on the Newcastle stage. It would be quite characteristic of a critic of twenty-two to make the most of his juvenile impressions.

We did not, however, arrive at this conclusion in time to include the earlier articles in the present volume. Very probably we should not have done so in any case, for they have neither the ability nor the importance of the maturer work here reprinted. What Forster writes of Macready must, of course, be taken with a certain caution, in view of the fact that he was the actor's most intimate and trusted friend. But his partiality for the actor does not affect the value of his analysis and exposition of the character as the poet designed it. We must distinguish between a critic's reasonings and his judgments, between the principles he enunciates and his application of these principles to particular cases. Many a performance which in itself was faulty enough has been purged of its baser elements in the critic's memory and imagination; and, while the ideal survives in his pages, helpful and inspiring, we need not enquire too curiously into the flaws of the reality out of which it grew. Forster's analyses are always acute, often convincing; and though we may suspect that, had we seen Macready's Hamlet or Othello, we should have found drawbacks to our enjoyment of which Forster takes no account, we may at least feel pretty confident that the critic interprets accurately the tragedian's *intentions*, which are, after all, of more interest to us than the defects of the physical instrument through which he had to express them. In brief, if a critic indicates convincingly what an actor ought to have done, posterity need not be too scrupulous in inquiring what he actually did do. The main fact is, after all, that Macready powerfully affected Forster's



imagination, and this cannot have been the result of their friendship alone. A bad actor's friends are no less bored than the rest of the world by his feeble performances.

A particular interest attaches to Forster's criticisms of Edwin Forrest, since they sowed seeds of irritation in that actor's perfervid bosom, which bore fruit, thirteen years later, in the sanguinary Astor Place riots in New York. I may perhaps be allowed to quote from my life of Macready (Eminent Actors Series, 1890) the paragraphs in which, after careful inquiry, I stated my view of Forster's share in this matter. After remarking that Forrest attributed the ill success of his second visit to England in 1845 entirely to the base machinations of Macready and his henchmen on the press, I went on to say:—"It must be admitted that the conduct of Forster, as critic of the *Examiner*, gave a faint tinge of colour to Forrest's suspicions. In 1836 Forster had stood almost alone among the critics of the day in condemning the blustering style of the American tragedian. He found a good deal to praise in his non-Shakespearian parts, but utterly condemned his Othello and his Lear. I know of few criticisms which convey so clear an idea of the performance criticised as these two articles of Forster's. They are full of masterly analysis and vivid description. Damaging they certainly were; but it was the writer's obvious sincerity and thoughtfulness that made them so. Macready, according to Albany Fonblanque, the editor of the *Examiner*, 'repeatedly entreated Mr. Forster to be lenient or silent, but Mr. Forster very properly maintained his independent judgment.' He must have known that his intimacy with Macready might subject both of them to injurious imputations in the matter; but no one who reads his articles will blame him for taking the risk. Very different was his



conduct on Forrest's second visit. Instead of criticising him frankly, as before, or ignoring him altogether, he wrote, or allowed to be written, two or three contemptuous paragraphs, after this fashion—

“ ‘ Our old friend, Mr. Forrest, afforded great amusement to the public by his performance of *Macbeth* on Friday evening at the Princess's. Indeed, our best comic actors do not often excite so great a quantity of mirth. The change from an inaudible murmur to a thunder of sound was enormous; but the grand feature was the combat, in which he stood scraping his sword against that of *Macduff*. We were at a loss to know what this gesture meant, till an enlightened critic in the gallery shouted out, “ That's right ! sharpen it ! ” ’ ”

“ Jibes like this, proceeding from the friend and satellite of another tragedian, were in flagrant ill taste.<sup>1</sup> The most perfect sincerity does not justify a man in wantonly exposing himself and others to misrepresentation. Forster certainly helped to start the snowball of misunderstanding which was soon to become an avalanche.”

If the reader will turn to pp. 17-41 of this volume, I am sure he will agree with me as to the evident sincerity, as well as the extraordinary vividness, of Forster's early criticisms of Forrest. The man himself seems to live before us. We not only see clearly what he did, but we recognise the tone of mind which betrayed him into these errors. I, at any rate, am old enough to remember, not Forrest himself, but actors of precisely the same intellectual quality or lack of quality. A whole school of acting is anatomised in these pages.

The article on Charles Kean (p. 41) shows an earnest effort after impartiality on Forster's part. Kean had somewhat curtly refused Macready's offer of an engagement

<sup>1</sup> Forster was ill about this time, so it is possible that these paragraphs may have been published without his cognizance.

during the first season of his management at Covent Garden, and was now brought forward at Drury Lane, by Macready's mortal enemy, the Poet Bunn, in almost avowed opposition to the enterprise in which Forster was so warmly interested. Under these circumstances, Forster's treatment of the young aspirant seems not only fair but astonishingly friendly. But it must be noted that after this one article Kean was incontinently dropped. When his performances came to a close, Forster quoted a most unfavourable notice of him from the *Morning Chronicle*, adding the remark that "What the young actor might have been in time, with the exercise of modesty and patience, is now, we fear, 'past praying for.'" Between January 8 and March 13, Kean had played Hamlet twenty-one times, Richard III. seventeen times, and Sir Giles Overreach five times, bringing £13,289 into the treasury; and on March 30 he was entertained at a public dinner and presented with a "magnificent silver vase." This astonishing, and no doubt very disproportionate, success could not be agreeable to the Macready faction; and the public dinner (held in the saloon of Drury Lane Theatre) was probably a mere managerial device, which they would naturally regard with indignation and contempt.

GEORGE HENRY LEWES's book,<sup>1</sup> *On Actors and the Art of Acting*, published in 1875, is one of the not too numerous classics of English dramatic criticism. No theatrical book of this half-century is, or deserves to be, more frequently quoted. Yet these 250 pages form but a meagre memorial of Lewes's passion for the theatre—a passion at once

<sup>1</sup> Some portions of the following pages have appeared in the *Fortnightly Review*, and are here reproduced by kind permission of the Editor.

enlightened and enlightening. It is not even generally known that this man of many interests and many accomplishments—certainly one of the most alert intelligences of his time—was for at least four of the best years of his life a professional dramatic critic, recording week by week the events of the theatrical world. Between March 1850 and June 1854, while in one column of the *Leader* "G. H. Lewes" was expounding "Comte's Positive Philosophy," demolishing Sludge the Medium, or maintaining the absurdity of the "spontaneous combustion" in *Bleak House*, in another column the gay and frivolous "Vivian" was bantering the Poet Bunn<sup>1</sup> on his conduct of "Dreary Lane," or criticising the latest farce adapted from the French by Maddison Morton, Buckstone, or Robert Brough. But "Vivian," though always vivacious, was not always frivolous, as the following reprint of his more important articles will sufficiently prove. The portraits of Edmund and Charles Kean, Macready, Charles Mathews, the Keeleys, Rachel, and Lemaître, which give to *Actors and Acting* its chief value, are nothing but summaries—7 closely condensed and cast in the reminiscent mood—of the impressions we here find in the course of formation. The summaries have their value, but the original articles are far more living, more instructive, and to our taste more delightful.

George Henry Lewes, born in 1817, was the grandson of Charles Lee Lewes, the original Young Marlow in *She Stoops to Conquer* and Fag in *The Rivals*. Thus his passion for the stage was hereditary; and it was not, at

<sup>1</sup> On February 21, 1852, he opens an article thus: "Friends, lovers, countrymen, and readers, I come to laugh at Bunn and not to praise him"—and proceeds to notice a piece which was "played in a style to secure it the most delightful privacy."

first, of that platonic order which is content to find its satisfactions on the hither side of the footlights. In the paper on Macready in *Actors and Acting*, arguing against the commonplace view that the evanescence of their art is a peculiar hardship to actors, he says: "If my estimate of the intrinsic value of acting is lower than seems generally current, it is from no desire to disparage an art I have always loved." It happens that this paper (and this alone) is reprinted from the *Leader*; and when it originally appeared (March 8, 1851) the words "an art I have always loved" were followed by the further phrase, "*and one in which I have a personal ambition.*" Thus we see that even so late as '51 he had not abandoned his hope of one day shining on the stage. His actual attempts in that direction were, however, all in the past. He is said to have appeared at the Whitehall Theatre in 1841 (æt. 24) in Garrick's comedy of *The Guardian*; but on this point I have no definite information. He was one of the Dickens group of amateurs, but appeared only in subordinate parts, such as Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives* and Old Knowell in *Every Man in his Humour*. He presently found larger scope for his ambition. On March 10, 1849, the following advertisement appeared in the *Manchester Guardian*:—

THEATRE ROYAL, MANCHESTER.—The last week of THE YELLOW DWARF. This evening (Saturday), March 10th, MR. G. H. LEWES, the popular author, will make his début in THE MERCHANT OF VENICE, one of the plays selected by the command of Her Majesty at Windsor Castle. SHYLOCK—MR. G. H. LEWES. After which the farce of BOX & COX. To conclude with the burlesque of THE YELLOW DWARF.

Barry Sullivan, then at the beginning of his career, played Bassanio both on this occasion and when the experiment

was repeated on March 14; but his biographer<sup>1</sup> states that he deeply resented playing seconds to this literary interloper, who was said to have boasted of his intention of stepping into the place soon to be left vacant by the retirement of Macready. Certain it is that Sullivan presently quarrelled with the manager and left the theatre; and though he did not say so in his speech to the audience, it is probable that Lewes was one of the causes of contention. Barry described Lewes as "a poor, weak creature"; and "Vivian's" criticism of his Hamlet (p. 175), when he made his first appearance in London, in February 1852, was by no means calculated to soothe his savage breast.<sup>2</sup>

The Manchester critics were greatly impressed with Lewes's literary eminence—he had published his *History of Philosophy* two years earlier, and had recently delivered a course of philosophical lectures in Manchester—so that they handled his Shylock with extreme tenderness. Yet the critic of the *Guardian* (Mr. Charles Sever) could not but confess that "from the first he had his misgivings as to Mr. Lewes's possession of the physical requisites for the personation of Shylock."

"We never [he wrote] felt the blood to curdle or the flesh to creep at the picture of fiendish malignity before us. His dress was

<sup>1</sup> W. J. Lawrence, *Barry Sullivan: A Biographical Sketch*, 1893.

<sup>2</sup> On April 9, 1853, Vivian's criticism of *Elopement in High Life*, a comedy at the Haymarket, opens thus: "We are in Timbuctoo. I will not guarantee the geography, but I assume the country to be Timbuctoo, because my knowledge of costume forbids the notion of any other country where a leader of fashion, a D'Orsay upon town, could possibly attire himself as Barry Sullivan does in this comedy! Imagine a young man of fashion dressed in a plum-coloured frock-coat, grey trousers strapped over cloth boots, round his neck a sky-blue scarf, with a gigantic fall fastened by a large brooch!"



picturesque and accurate, even to the three-pointed beard which we believe was the characteristic of the ancient Israelite. But there was too much of repose, almost of gentleness, in his general manner, which marred rather than added to the effect of his outbursts, by making them appear forced and unreal. His countenance was mild, and in its occasional expression reminded us of one of the early divines of the Church rather than the sordid, malignant, revengeful Jew."

The writer, however, declares that he "states his opinions with hesitation, feeling that he is more likely to have erred than Mr. Lewes." Even more respectful and friendly is the critic of the *Examiner and Times*, who, Mr. Francis Espinasse assures me, was Mrs. Carlyle's friend, Geraldine Jewsbury.

"It was an intense and thoughtful performance. . . . There was a freshness and purity of manner, a high refinement in the whole mode of his acting, which would not at first fall with telling effect on a public accustomed to the conventional exaggerations. . . . But it is a performance that *comes back* to us, and we think of it with more complacency than we felt when surrounded with the glare of lamps, and all the highly artificial adjuncts of theatrical life. It was like *daylight* and *candlelight* struggling together. . . . The *faculty* lies in him, which is the one thing needful. All he wants is to be able to *let himself go*. . . . Mr. Lewes never for one instant allowed the audience to lose the impression that he was a noble nature driven to outlawry by MEN."

Both papers give a detailed notice of the second performance, and both state that on the first night Lewes was suffering from an affection of the throat which prevented him from doing himself full justice. It is curious, though perhaps not quite inexplicable, that Lewes's conception of Shylock seems in many ways to have anticipated that of Sir Henry Irving. The *Examiner's* phrase about "a noble nature driven to outlawry" might quite well be applied to the Shylock of our own day, and so might the remark of the *Guardian* that Lewes's "best effect was the look of blank despair with which he receives the intimation

of the consequence of his shedding one drop of blood." Curious, too, but entirely explicable, is the fact that he seems to have sinned against the principle of the *optique du théâtre*, which in later days he was never tired of enforcing. He lost no opportunity of exposing the fallacy which lurks in the term "natural" as applied to acting; yet it is evident that in Shylock he aimed at being "natural," and succeeded only, as Mr. Espinasse says in his charming *Literary Recollections*, in being "palpably ineffective." Was it a realisation of this error that made him afterwards insist so strongly on the necessity of blending the ideal with the merely "natural"?

But Lewes's histrionic experiments did not end here. In the *Manchester Guardian* of Saturday, April 14, 1849, the following advertisement appeared:—

"On Monday will be produced a New Tragedy (never acted), entitled THE NOBLE HEART. Mr. G. H. Lewes, the author, will sustain the principal character."

The "Noble Heart" which gives the play its title beats in the bosom of Don Gomez de la Vega. He loves Juanna, a maiden of low degree, and she, to save her father from bankruptcy, marries him. On the marriage-day, the youth to whom her heart is given returns from the wars, and proves to be Don Gomez's son, Leon. A passionate scene ensues between the lovers, and is interrupted by the father-husband. At first he is furious, but on learning that they were betrothed before he ever saw Juanna, he waives his claim upon her, and retires to the desert with his friend Herman, to become an anchorite. The play is neither better nor worse than half a hundred blank-verse tragedies of the period. It contains some tolerable lines, and a good deal of sorry fustian such as this:

*Antonio.* Now wilt thou taste the joy of life—I long  
 To kiss Bellona's swart, blood-mantling face,  
 And in the rushing whirlwind of a charge,  
 Plunge on their ranks amidst a storm of blows.

It is written throughout in this pseudo-Elizabethan dialect, and one of the tirades of Don Gomez is unmistakably borrowed from the picture-scene in *Hernani*—yet Lewes contemned Victor Hugo as a dramatist (see p. 191), and held the current imitation of the Elizabethans to be the bane of the English drama. It is not a little surprising to find the author of *The Noble Heart*, only a few months after its production, writing the articles which we here reprint on "The Old and Modern Dramatists" (p. 101), and on "The Duchess of Malfi" (p. 118). Had he profited by his experience, or did he believe himself to have avoided the vices of the Elizabethans while adopting their form? In the latter case, he was strangely deceived.

The critic of the *Manchester Guardian* declared Lewes's Don Gomez "a vast improvement on his Shylock," but it is clear that the play left him very cold. The *Examiner and Times* was much more cordial, averring that

"*The Noble Heart* is an excellent play; it is true, powerful without exaggeration, and highly tragic, without any morbid tampering with forbidden passions. We do not run great risk in prognosticating for it a permanent existence on the stage."

Alas! this is always a perilous prognostication. In a second notice, the critic says of Lewes: "His manner is that of everyday life, and therein is full of truth, but it lacks that boldness of touch, that broad outline, which a well-studied master knows how to value and when to use." Again a neglect of the *optique du théâtre*!—or it would probably be more just to say, an amateur's



inability to get out of himself and into his character. He played it four times in Manchester, and once, at least, in Liverpool.

There is something delightfully modern in the remark (as though it were a pleasant surprise) that the play is "without any morbid tampering with forbidden passions." But that was not the view of other critics. On February 19, 1850, *The Noble Heart* was produced in London at the Olympic Theatre, recently rebuilt after a fire. G. V. Brooke played Ruy Gomez; Mrs. Anna Cora Mowatt, Juanna; E. L. Davenport, Leon; and Ryder, the monk, Herman. The audience was enthusiastic and adopted the then unusual course of calling for the author, who "passed smiling across the stage"; but the papers were somewhat frigidly polite. The *Times* declared the fault of the piece to be "an over-predilection for controversial dialogue. Here we think we may see the influence of Pierre Corneille"—whom, by the way, Lewes rather disliked. The *Spectator*, whether in praise or censure does not quite appear, pronounced the plot "Byronic," and (differing from the Manchester *Guardian*) blamed the author for "a marked inclination to approach subjects shocking to the fastidious." "The arrangement," it went on, "seems to come from Corneille, the personages appear to step out of Calderon, while there is a love for abstract debate which may be assigned indifferently to France or Spain." The London *Examiner* makes a penetrating remark of very wide application—

"It is not Don Gomez, or Juanna, or Leon whom we seem to hear; but rather an intimate friend, or next-door neighbour, a philosophical critic of emotion, who is privy to all they are feeling and undergoing, understands it thoroughly, and is good enough to put it into very choice language for them and for us."

The unkindest cut of all, however, came from the *Morning Herald*, in an article of such elevated style that I cannot resist quoting it at some length—

“Although the laying out of a rather disagreeable story betrays a want of experience in the arts of construction, the language is often of a superior description, and the images which are liberally put into the mouths of the leading speakers are varied and poetical. . . . The author indulges in a succession of discursive dialogues, partly didactic and partly polemical, which protract the drama to the prescriptive duration of time, though not infrequently at the expense of public patience. Some abbreviations therefore may be counselled, even to the extent of an entire act. . . . The applause was elicited mainly by the nervous force of the Elizabethan rhapsodies, by the morality of the admonitions, and the felicitousness of the metaphors.”

Poor Lewes! he had already cut down five acts to three, so that the demand for further “abbreviation even to the extent of an entire act” can hardly have been agreeable to him. In his dedicatory epistle to [Sir] Arthur Helps, Lewes says—

“The prudery of theatrical æsthetics is astonishing. . . . What think you of the established conviction among ‘experienced’ men, that English audiences will not tolerate the name of the Deity pronounced on the stage! You may say ‘*Him*,’ and point upwards, but you may not say ‘*God*.’ I am dull enough not to see the merits of this distinction; and, moreover, I am curious to know where this prudery will stop. I write, ‘The heart hath but one resting-place—in God.’ But I am not allowed the expression:—it is ‘softened’ into ‘Heaven.’”

It was the same Censor who, in one of Mr. Gilbert’s plays, altered “Chambers fit for a lord” into “Chambers fit for a Heaven.” Lewes further states that Ryder played the monk, Herman, badly because he was afraid of the part and “went on the stage dreading lest he should be hissed for saying—

“ Why do the stars for ever speak to us  
Throughout the solemn night? Why does the sea  
Keep sounding on its multitudinous moan,  
Its many-voicèd resonance of woe?—  
Are not these warnings from the Infinite  
Calling us unto Him.”

To show how things have altered, I may mention that a few hours before I read this preface of Lewes's, I had heard an actress—none other than Mrs. Kendal—say on the stage, “Oh, why is man so much more pure than God!”

The tragedy was acted eight times within a fortnight, unbroken “runs” being as yet a rare exception. The last performance took place on the 1st of March, and on the 7th the theatre suddenly closed its doors. The manager, Watts, according to E. L. Blanchard, was said to have lost £400 a week. He was an employee of the Globe Insurance Company, and was presently arrested on a charge of embezzlement, his defalcations, it was said, amounting to £80,000. On the 13th of July following, he hanged himself in Newgate Prison.

While his tragedy was being rehearsed and acted, Lewes must have been busily engaged in completing arrangements for the publication of the *Leader*, the first number of which appeared on Saturday, March 30, 1850. Of its initiation, Mr. W. J. Linton gives the following account (*Recollections*, p. 119):—

“Some correspondence with Thornton Hunt resulted in our projecting a weekly newspaper, the *Leader*. . . . W. E. Forster took shares in the venture; we had also help from Minter Morgan, a friend of Robert Owen; but the principal funds were contributed by the Rev. Edmund Larken, a friend of Hunt and a ‘Christian Socialist’ of the stamp of Maurice and Kingsley. . . . My purpose was to make the *Leader* at once an organ of the European Republicans and the centre of an English republican party. . . . The *Leader* was

started: Hunt as principal editor and manager, Lewes as literary editor, myself taking the place of editor for foreign matters. . . . I had soon to find that Hunt's and Lewes's sympathies with the republican party were not to be depended on, that they merely wanted to exploit the connection for the commercial advantage of the paper. After a few weeks, I gave up my position."

If the republicanism of Lewes and Hunt did not come up to Mr. Linton's standard, their radicalism was sound enough. And whatever else they may have been, they were first-rate journalists. They turned out a most interesting paper. In going over the files I have had perpetually to resist (not always with success) the temptation to indulge in miscellaneous browsing. Many columns were every week devoted to literature, and Lewes introduced the reviews with a paragraphic causerie on general literary topics, distinguished by his peculiar gift of what I am tempted to call sparkling common sense. A novel by Lewes ran through the early numbers; it came to a "pause" in No. 11, at the end of the "Second Episode," and was never resumed. Froude contributed anonymously; and in the column devoted to poetry we find side by side the names of the aged Landor and the youthful Meredith. From a very early point, if not from the beginning, Mr. E. F. S. Pigott (the late Censor of the Stage) took an active part in the venture. He is said to have invested (and lost) money in it, and is sometimes described as the Editor; but his editorial functions must have been merely nominal while Hunt supervised the political, and Lewes the literary, department. On July 19th, 1851, at any rate, he adopted the pseudonym of "Le Chat-Huant," under which designation he frequently acted as Lewes's deputy in dealing with theatrical and musical matters.

From the very first Lewes paid close attention both to

the theatres and to the opera,<sup>1</sup> but he did not at first sign his articles. The pseudonym of "Vivian" appears in the third number and frequently thereafter, generally attached to light and satirical essays on such subjects as "The Beauty of Married Men," "The Talent for Silence," "A Gentle Hint to Writing Women," and so forth. In the last-named article he professes to be panic-stricken in view not only of the number but the talent of "writing women"—Curren Bell, Mrs. Gaskell, Geraldine Jewsbury, Mrs. Marsh, Mrs. Crowe, Mrs. Rigby, Miss Martineau, "Eliza Lynn"—and implores them not to crowd the other sex entirely out of the field. "Burn your pens," he cries, "and purchase wool. Arm-chairs are to be made, waistcoats to be embroidered"—and though waistcoats are no longer to be embroidered, we hear practically the same cry echoed to-day in many quarters, with less humour and more acerbity. The paper was seven months old before the signature of Vivian was appropriated to the theatrical criticisms. On November 9th, a notice of Westland Marston's *Marie de Mèranie* at the Olympic opened with this paragraph:—

"Angry authors and irritated actors are fond of styling us,—the nobles of the Fourth Estate,—'anonymous scribblers.' I don't like this; I won't have it assumed that my fine Roman hand ever could be anonymous; accordingly, from this time forward, I throw aside the veil which modesty dropped over my countenance, and stand forth confessed as the author of all the brilliant criticisms, shameless eulogies, and remorseless 'attacks,' which may issue from my incomparable judgment, devoted partizanship, and deranged liver. I am prepared for all the 'responsibility' of my office. Brother critics may do as they please, but if I am a 'hired bravo' I will no longer wear a mask. Managers, authors, actors—*trrrremble!* VIVIAN is pitiless!"

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<sup>1</sup> None of his musical notices are here reprinted. They are long and, I imagine, interesting; but I am no judge of their merits.



And, having assumed a name, Lewes speedily invented a character to suit it. One of the first things that strikes the reader of these criticisms is their astonishing *modernness*. They are modern in every sense—not only in their serious qualities, but also in their frivolities and fripperies. All the vices, as they are harshly termed, of the New Criticism—I should prefer to call them foibles—show forth, full-blown, in this critic of the early 'fifties. Vivian is intensely personal; he does not even condescend to the trick of dissembling the "I" under the too transparent "one." When he is not inclined to write about his subject, he babbles about whatever else comes into his head, with a free-and-easiness unsurpassed even by "Spectator" or "Corno di Bassetto" in the starry youth of the New Journalism. And if he does not usually attain to sceptical impressionism, or Lemaîtreism—if he is apt to have an opinion and state it, and even appeal to first principles in support of it—he is always ready to step down from the high places of his own ideal and to adopt the standpoint of those who go to the theatre in quest, not of art, but of mere amusement. Writing of a new play by Bourcicault (so the name was then spelt), he thus expresses his conception—and a very sound one it is, to my thinking—of the dual nature of the critic's function:—

"Although I have a great objection to *Love in a Maze* being considered as a comedy, or as a literary work of pretensions, although it did not interest me during its performance, although it contains none of those scenes or touches which revisit the memory and induce one to see it again, I should be belying the very nature of my office were this article to go forth without an emphatic addition of praise for the cleverness with which old materials are worked up, and the animation of the dialogue, which sparkles pleasantly and without effort. My office is twofold: first, that of Taster to the Public, intimating what dishes are piquant, pleasant, stimulating, or nauseous and unwholesome; secondly,

that of Critic, intimating what is good and what is bad in respect of Art. If in my second capacity I condemn this comedy, in my first I am bound to recommend it, for the audience certainly relished it.”—(March 15, 1851.)

Could anything be more Lemaîtreque, again, than his treatment of *The Templar*, by Slous, at the Princess's? He does not care for the play; it is a theatrical, not a literary, success; “it is worth little as an intellectual effort.” But, he continues, “if I were the author, I would undertake to vindicate my play by ample extracts from Aristotle (I sometimes read that respectable authority on wet mornings)” —and he proceeds to make out a case for the piece, on the ground that Aristotle declares it possible to write a tragedy *ἀνευ δὲ ἡθῶν*, and admits the most fascinating parts of a play to be the *περιπέτεια* and the *ἀναγνώρισις*. This ironic arguing a case for the argument's sake is the very essence of Lemaîtrism.

Let me give a few instances of Vivian Vivianising. The character, or rather the mask, the *persona*, is at once a coxcomb and a student. The two fictions on which he is always insisting are, first, that he is a gay young dog of a bachelor; second, that it is his chief delight to sit by the fireside with his slippers on the hob and read the Fathers in their original tongues. Under the heading of “Vivian to his Correspondents” (May 31, 1851), he answers two apparently genuine correspondents, and then concludes the paragraph thus: “To you, fair madam, so flatteringly desirous of knowing ‘*Who is Vivian?*’ I have but one soft whisper: I live at No. 13 Tooley Street, Borough, and am visible every Sunday—after morning service.” Descanting upon “The Leisure of a Dramatic Critic,” he writes (January 25, 1851)—

"My evenings, instead of being spent in a hot theatre, redolent of humanity, are passed serenely by the fireside, where I relax myself with a cigar and *Aristotle*, or an agreeable volume of *Chrysostomi Opera*. So that, when I am called into active service again, I can fling one of the Christian Fathers at the head of some farce-writer with all the air of a man worthy to be a bishop."

A little later (February 14) appears an article headed "Vivian not at the Play," in which he explains that instead of going to see *Adrienne Lecouvreur* he stopped at home and "opened a squat quarto containing *Χριστός πάσχων*," the earliest example of the Modern Drama, and reputed product of "my favourite Gregory of Nazianzen." When "Vivian *Ægrotat*," and *Le Chat-Huant* takes his place, a paragraph, purporting to be written by *Le Chat-Huant*, but entirely in Vivian's manner, explains that the doctor has ordered him to "depart the intellectual life and be a vegetable," and that "he is forbidden all access to his library, especially to the shelves of Patristic Theology." When the Lyceum reopens in 1851 (with a revival of his own adaptation of *Mercadet*) he complains bitterly of being dragged out to see "the comedy of my lucky but over-estimated friend, Slingsby Lawrence." "I had passed Sunday," he says, "with the stately Harriet, and never before had I been so near making a fool of myself by offering my hand and copyrights where I had already given my heart." He had, however, escaped this peril, and on Monday evening, "was just taking refuge in a severe perusal of Tertullian *Ad Uxorem*," when the printer's devil summoned him to the theatre. On July 17, 1852, under the heading "Vivian in the Dumps," he writes to "Dear Chat-Huant"—

"The dog-days in London are too formidable. . . . A pall of ennui is spread over the sky. I am as mopish as if I were married and lived



in a provincial town. That adorable Fanny who says she ‘likes Vivian when he is serious,’ would adore me now. I am as serious as taxes. By the way, I wish you would tell Fanny the next time she complains of my being ‘such a coxcomb,’ that her complaint is idle. Why should I not be a coxcomb if nature has made me one? Nature has need of coxcombs—she delights in them, or she would not make them.”

Being too lazy to deal with the Christmas pieces of 1851-52, he writes—

“In three or four Country Houses of England there exists at this moment a very pleasant superstition to the effect that Christmas without the presence of VIVIAN is the holly without its berries, the pudding without its citron, enjoyment without its last grace and refinement. A very agreeable superstition, I say! Let no man tamper with it!”

—and he proceeds to reprint from the *Times* four columns about the Pantomimes. The following Christmas (1852) found him no more inclined for work. This is the whole theatrical article of the number, dated December 25—

“The boy who was sent to Vivian’s house for the ‘copy’ expected under this head, brought back word that he was invisible, not at home to any one. A slip of paper was handed by his servant to our boy. We print it without comment—

‘Πρὸς τοὺς νέους, ὅπως ἂν ἐξ Ἑλληνικῶν ὠφελοῖντο λόγων.

VIVIAN.’”<sup>1</sup>

He makes a whole article (entirely good-humoured) out of his going to the opera in grey trousers and being refused

<sup>1</sup> The friend to whom I applied for an elucidation of this freak of Vivian’s, writes as follows:—“One of Saint Basil’s works is entitled: *λόγος πρὸς τοὺς νέους ὅπως ἂν ἐξ Ἑλληνικῶν ὠφελοῖντο λόγων*. ‘Address to the Young, whereby they may derive benefit from Greek Letters.’ If the man had not been a Saint, he would have used the subjunctive after *ὅπως ἂν* and shamed the Devil.” Lewes himself alludes to the “inelegant Greek” of the passage. See p. 225.

admission; and half his notice of Bourcicault's *Prima Donna* consists of an account of how he and *Le Chat-Huant* somehow softened the heart of a railway-guard (I do not quite understand the adventure) by pretending to be Frenchmen. He begins an article on "Mlle. Luther and the Art of Acting" (March 5, 1853) with a long rhapsody about "Fanny with the dove-like eyes . . . the languorous Julia, orientalising my soul . . . the gay Maria . . . and the stately Jane, who married Brown—*le butor*!" An article on "The Winter Theatres" (October 9, 1852) consists for the most part of mere unabashed flummery about lady correspondents, one of whom "wonders why I don't leave Greek and Latin to snuffy pedants and writers in quarterly reviews." On another occasion (and this shall be my last specimen of the "volatile" Vivian), under the title, "De Rebus Scenicis (Et Quibusdam Aliis)," he devotes a whole column to mere whimsical nonsense, quoting Rousseau's "Je sais bien que le lecteur n'a pas grand besoin de savoir tout cela; mais moi, j'ai grand besoin de le lui dire," and proceeding, "This is my answer to correspondents like the one who signs himself *Eselkopf*, 'And is himself the great sublime he *signs*.' He objects to my telling him about Maria's eyes. 'What does he care about Maria?' If it comes to that, what does Maria care about him?" This is dated May 7, 1853. On the 16th of the previous month George Eliot wrote to Mrs. Bray: "People are very good to me. Mr. Lewes especially is kind and attentive, and has quite won my regard; after having had a good deal of my vituperation. Like a few other people in the world, he is much better than he seems. A man of heart and conscience wearing the mask of flippancy."

It would be no less impertinent than uncritical to assume that Vivian's "stately Harriets" and "languorous Julias"

had any objective existence. At the same time it is curious to remark that, during the very years when Lewes was pouring forth this irresponsible chatter, that friendship was ripening which was fraught with such notable results for English literature. Marian Evans came to London in September 1851, and took up her abode with the Chapmans at 142 Strand. Her introduction to Lewes took place almost immediately after her arrival. She described him as "a sort of miniature Mirabeau in appearance" (Mrs. Carlyle's nickname for him was "the Ape").<sup>1</sup> They saw a good deal of each other from the first; but it was no doubt this very veneer of flippancy which made her begin by rather disliking him. Not till March 1853 do we find her writing to Sara Hennell: "Lewes has quite won my liking, in spite of myself." It was in July 1854 that they took the decisive step of going abroad together, at which time, says Mr. J. W. Cross, "not only was Mr. Lewes's previous family life irretrievably spoilt, but his home had been wholly broken up for nearly two years."

The critic Vivian, no less than the man Lewes, did himself a certain injustice by these flippancies. So soon as there was any occasion for seriousness, he resolutely put off the cap and bells. Beside the modernity of his criticism, or above it, as an even higher virtue, I would place its ardent sincerity. He loves the theatre, wholly and devotedly. Though now and then he affects to resent being dragged away from his arm-chair and *Chrysostomi Opera*, there is a much more genuine ring in his lamentation (October 25, 1851) when almost all the theatres are closed,

<sup>1</sup> "The one honest musical critic at this time was Henry F. Chorley, nearly the ugliest man in London. George Henry Lewes and Thornton Hunt ran him hard on this point, and together they were known as the Three Graces."—John Hollingshead, *My Lifetime*, vol. i., p. 65.

and his outburst, a month later: "The theatrical trumpet sounds; and VIVIAN is at his post! 'Reopening'! What a beautiful word!" Yet the period was one of apparent decadence (in reality, we may hope, of transition), when the truest lover of the theatre might have been excused for turning his back on it in despair. Macready retired less than a year after Vivian's campaign commenced, and there was no one—not even Lewes himself!—to step into his shoes. The "legitimate" drama was left to Anderson at Drury Lane, Charles Kean at the Princess's, and Phelps at Sadler's Wells. Anderson, a man of small talent and no culture, blundered through two disastrous seasons. Charles Kean introduced the modern system of gorgeous mounting and feeble acting, intolerable to a playgoer who remembered the great Edmund. As for Phelps—Sadler's Wells seems somehow to have lain outside Vivian's province. It is my one serious reproach against him that, though he always spoke respectfully of Phelps, he did little or nothing to support his heroic enterprise. Of original English plays only two were produced during these four years which are now remembered even by name—*Masks and Faces* (p. 222) and *Plot and Passion* (p. 266). Douglas Jerrold, indeed, produced two plays, but for neither of them could Lewes find much to say, and time has in each case endorsed his judgment. His article on *Retired from Business* (May 10, 1851) opens thus:—

"Douglas Jerrold, I am about to remonstrate with you. Don't talk to me about Friendship; if one can't speak the truth to one's friends, to whom can it be spoken? *Retired from Business* is *not* a comedy greatly to my taste, and is *not* a comedy worthy of your powers."

Of *St. Cupid; or, Dorothy's Fortune*, he remarked that there was only "a slender thread of dramatic anecdote" under the "fireworks of wit"—and the criticism was

certainly just, though the metaphor was open to question.<sup>1</sup> Two of Westland Marston's plays, *Marie de Méranie* and *Anne Blake*, were produced within this period, but Lewes was not deeply impressed with either of them, and both are now forgotten.

For the rest, the stage was under the absolute domination of France, and especially of Scribe. Lewes himself, under the pseudonyms of Slingsby Lawrence and Frank Churchill, adapted at least ten French plays, most of them for Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris at the Lyceum. He adapted *La Joie fait Peur* (*Sunshine through the Clouds*), *Le Village* (*A Cosy Couple*—since re-adapted as *The Vicarage*), and Balzac's *Mercadet* (*The Game of Speculation*). "This version," he says, "was written in less than thirteen hours,<sup>2</sup> and produced after only two rehearsals." The names of the characters are sufficient to show how lightly he took his task. Mercadet is "Affable Hawk," his partner is "Sparrow," his friend is "Mr. Prospectus," the cruel creditor is "Hardcore," the grovelling creditor "Earthworm," and the sympathetic lover is "Frederick Noble." Lewes's contempt for the minor Elizabethans did not prevent him from accepting this childish tradition of nomenclature. He also collaborated with Mathews in adapting

<sup>1</sup> The comedy was originally produced at Windsor Castle, and Lewes comments in a strain of elaborate sarcasm upon the fact that the author had not been invited to see his own play. Kean, according to Westland Marston (*Our Recent Actors*, I. 206), had further offended Jerrold by offering to "take him under his wing" and let him see the piece from the side-scenes.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. John Hollingshead (*op. cit.*) states that he shut himself up in a room at the top of the theatre building, with several shorthand writers, to whom he dictated in turn. Their notes were then transcribed passage by passage, and taken down to the stage, where the actors were in waiting to study and rehearse without a moment's delay.



two French melodramas, *A Strange History* and *A Chain of Events*; and among his other adaptations (the list is probably not complete) were *The Lawyers*, *Give a Dog a Bad Name*, and *Taking by Storm*, all produced at the Lyceum, and *Buckstone's Adventure with a Polish Princess*, produced at the Haymarket.

As the question of the critic-dramatist is one which comes periodically under discussion, it may be worth while to note how Vivian and Vivian's organ treated the works of "Slingsby Lawrence." *The Game of Speculation* was eulogised in an article signed Th. H. (Thornton Hunt):—

"The play may be called an original translation. De Balzac wrote the comedy of *Mercadet*, a satire on the bourgeois trading spirit of Louis Philippe's reign; Mr. 'Slingsby Lawrence,' as the English writer pleases to call himself, has written a comedy with the same number of acts and the same plot, a satire on the trading and speculative spirit of England."

This assertion, though doubtless put forth in all sincerity, was distinctly misleading. The "originality" of the translation lay solely in the more or less inappropriate interpolation of some of that "wit" which belongs to the tradition of English comedy. The attempt, if attempt there was, to Anglicise the picture of manners was certainly not successful. Charles Mathews' famous "business" of imitating a jumping-jack with his fingers whenever he had successfully "pulled the strings" of one of his dupes, was, I believe, of Lewes's invention. It belonged to the general transposition of the character of *Mercadet* into a tone of light-comedy, which was necessary in adapting for Mathews a character played in France by Geoffroy and Got. In other respects, the adaptation follows the original very faithfully. It would be futile, indeed, to look for any radical remodelling in an improvisation of thirteen hours. When, at Easter, 1852,

*A Chain of Events*, "a dramatic Story in eight acts," adapted by Mathews and Slingsby Lawrence, was produced at the Lyceum, it was noticed in the *Leader* by a critic who used the initial Z—"the majestic Z," Vivian on one occasion calls him. "And the audience sat it all out?" writes Z. "Sat it out! They clung to the whole story with unflagging interest." The following Easter, Vivian himself noticed *A Strange History*, "a dramatic Tale in nine chapters," by the same adapters:—

"I seize this opportunity of giving Slingsby Lawrence a bit of my mind (he won't take it; authors never do; the 'envy of critics!') as regards construction. . . . Arrive at your climax, or series of incidents leading to the climax, as quickly as you can, effectively. Now this, O Slingsby!—this, O angry Lawrence!—you have not done in *A Strange History*; and hence failure."

A few weeks earlier (February 12, 1853), in writing of Ravel, Lewes alluded to another of his own adaptations. In *Le Chevalier des Dames*, he says—

"Ravel was very funny—but when is he not funny? When? Why, in *Tambour Battant*, for example. Last June an imitation of this piece was produced at the Lyceum, under the title of *Taking by Storm*. I . . . said it was an 'extravagance rendered amusing by good acting.' So it was. I made an enemy of the author, and yet the fact remains as stated."

Charles Mathews, he goes on to say, was so much more rapid than Ravel, that he made the piece amusing, though "he has not a tithe of the *vis comica* of Ravel." We may bear in mind this candid criticism of Mathews, his friend and collaborator, when we come to consider Lewes's treatment of Charles Kean.

In sum, I find no instance in which Lewes, either in person or by proxy, unduly puffed his own wares; nor does



Vivian's freedom of judgment seem to have been in any way hampered by Slingsby Lawrence's closer relations with the stage.<sup>1</sup>

Another most important point in the ethics of theatrical criticism came prominently to the front during Vivian's tenure of office. On January 15, 1853, the following editorial notice appeared in the *Leader*:—

#### PRESS ORDERS TO THEATRES, ETC.

*We have resolved, in common with the most respected of our contemporaries, to discontinue the use of the press-privilege of writing Orders of Admission to the Theatres and other places of public amusement. Henceforth no such Orders will be issued from this Office to any person, whether connected with the LEADER or not.*

The same number contained an article by Vivian headed "The Press and the Stage":—

"Of course you know [he wrote] that newspapers, besides sending their critics gratis to the theatres, have also the privilege of writing 'orders' nightly, which orders, ostensibly admitting critics and

<sup>1</sup> When Dion Boucicault appeared in his own play, *The Vampire*, Vivian wrote (June 19, 1852): "Personal reasons which are unnecessary to be stated here prevent my offering an opinion on Mr. Bourcicault in his new character as *Actor*"—and he quotes from the *Times* a long notice, in which the play is condemned and the performance praised. Sometimes he showed himself almost ruthlessly independent of personal considerations. He seems to have been on very good terms with Bulwer Lytton, whom he generally mentions with a great deal of respect; yet he did not hesitate to write thus about *The Lady of Lyons* at Drury Lane (January 11, 1851): "It amuses the critic by showing what wretched attempts at wit, and what *poetry*, will pass current with an audience, provided the story have movement, the situations interest, and the construction be skilful."

reporters, do really admit friends and advertisers. Charles Mathews computes that if every person admitted by a press order to the Lyceum during his management had paid money for that admission, the theatre would have received no less a sum than £25,000."

Of course it may be said, Vivian continues, that the persons who came with orders would not in any case have paid. But he argues that Mathews' figures rather understate than overstate the actual loss, since the knowledge that orders are obtainable begets in a large class of people a general disinclination to pay for their theatrical amusements. As we should put it nowadays, the institution of "paper" impoverishes the theatrical world as a whole, by bringing into existence the habitual and impenitent dead-head. "On the first establishment of this paper," says Vivian, "I refused every species of privilege." This remark, taken literally, would imply that he refused even a personal free admission; but in the absence of all previous allusion to such a self-denying ordinance, it seems doubtful whether he went so far as this. In any case, he struggled against the general order-system, but to no purpose.<sup>1</sup> It was found that advertisers would have nothing to say to the *Leader* unless, like the other papers, it offered them a bonus in the shape of orders.

"I accepted 'orders' therefore. Whether it has affected my independence may safely be left to your decision. Friend or foe, no man can say that this pen has written of him what this brain did not think. Impartiality is impossible.

"Now that the question has come to be discussed, it behoves the Press, for its own dignity, to forego the use of such a 'privilege,' and I, for my part, now do so."

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<sup>1</sup> On January 4, 1851, he wrote an article headed "What Theatre shall I go to?" opening thus, "My answer is brief, and, let me add, judicious—'Go to *all*.' Whereupon insinuating voices hint at 'orders,' but I am incorruptible and sternly bid them 'pay'!"

It appears that now, at any rate, he renounced not only the privilege of writing orders, but also that of personal free admission; for a fortnight later (January 29) he begins as follows his notice of Jerrold's *St. Cupid* at the Princess's:—

“ ‘Base is the slave who pays!’ When Pistol uttered that energetic and admirable sentiment, he had never known what it is to enjoy a ‘press privilege,’ and, suddenly deprived thereof, to open the theatre by means of a silver key. I knew it on Saturday last. It was a new sensation: ‘quite refreshing,’ as the elegant writers phrase it. I felt independent for once. I, who had never dared to whisper a word of objection against any manager, actor, or author—I, whose amiable admiration had been uniformly purchased (cheap, too, at the price)—I, who called Caulfield a tenor and Charles Kean a tragedian, who rhapsodised about Harrison, and doted on Castellán—I was at last to ‘speak my mind!’ And what a mind!”

A few weeks later (February 26), in referring to Albert Smith's pamphlet, “*Press Orders*”; *being the opinions of the leading Journals on the Abolition of Newspaper Privileges*, Lewes writes: “From all I can learn, the ‘reform’ will be simply confined to relieving us from the trouble and manifold vexation of writing orders: the real mischief of orders was not that the Press used them indiscriminately, but that managers had not the courage to play to small audiences.” It is probably true that the change conduced rather to the dignity of the Press than to the prosperity of the theatres. The managers themselves now issued the orders which had formerly been distributed by the newspapers, and to this day the passion for “paper” reigns in the breasts of the noble army of dead-heads. It is clear, however, that the old system of press-orders would be physically impossible under present conditions, when a great success fills every available seat in a theatre seven times a week for months on end.

It seems rather odd that Lewes, in the above extract, should write as though it were a new experience to him to open the Princess's Theatre with a silver key. Nearly a year before, as appears from the article headed "Vivian in Tears" (p. 172), Charles Kean had cut him off the free list; and during that year he had "paid in" (he gives us to understand) at least three times, to see Kean in *King John*, in *The Corsican Brothers*, and in Lovell's *Trial of Love*. He can scarcely have been restored to the manager's favour in the interval, for he continued to jibe at him unmercifully. Of the absolute honesty, and even of the substantial justice, of Lewes's criticism of Kean there can be no doubt; but it would probably have been more dignified, and certainly more humane, to have refrained from "rubbing it in" quite so persistently. It is clear that Lewes had from the outset a warm sympathy with Charles Kean's managerial experiment, and that this sympathy led him, at first, to pass as lightly as he could over what he considered the radical defects of Kean's acting in heroic parts. That he was acutely conscious of these defects, long before his quarrel with the actor, is evident enough. Westland Marston relates that in November 1850, on the first night of *The Templar*, "a keen if somewhat fastidious critic—the late Mr. G. H. Lewes, no warm admirer of the actor—observed to me, 'Charles Kean is changing his style into a natural one. He will convert me yet.'" As a matter of fact, Charles Kean was, half-consciously and very unwillingly, developing from a tragedian into a character-actor. Lewes gave him unstinted praise in the characters, such as Ford and the Corsican Brothers, which marked this development. But his effort after "naturalness" was, as Lewes pointed out, wrongly applied in heroic parts, in which it combined with his defects of voice and mannerisms

of delivery to make confusion worse confounded. At the same time, it was on these heroic and poetic performances that he chiefly valued himself, and when they were slighted he found scant consolation in praise bestowed on his efforts in what Lewes called "the Blood and Bogey School." "His profits from *The Corsican Brothers*," says Westland Marston, "were far greater than those from any other work he had produced. 'Ah,' said he, with a melancholy which the monetary success of this piece a good deal tempered, 'the old legitimate is fast dying before these new sensations. Fill your glass, and let two old-fashioned actors [Kean and his wife] drink sympathetically with an old-fashioned dramatist. Perhaps we shall be the last of our race.'" Moreover, he was morbidly avid of praise and sensitive to blame. "Oh, I hate impartiality!" he cried on one occasion. "I like the admiration that carries a man away, and won't let him stop to think of a few slight and accidental defects." Many anecdotes are related of his child-like avowals of this foible, and of his quaint dealings with his critics, one of whom he once locked up for several hours in a room at the Princess's, for having ventured to call one of Mrs. Kean's performances "vulgar." It was not to be expected that such a manager should long remain on cordial terms with so outspoken a critic as Vivian. The immediate cause of the rupture is not very clear, but it certainly cannot have been anything to justify the deliberate insult of singling the critic out for exclusion from the theatre. In giving way to this little gust of temper, Kean placed himself at a foolish disadvantage, and the banter of "Vivian in Tears" cannot be called an excessive revenge. Nor could Kean reasonably complain of the direct criticism to which Lewes afterwards subjected him. If not absolutely just—of what criticism can absolute justice be



predicated?—it was at least sincere and able. But in minor paragraphs and passing allusions, Vivian was for ever girding at Kean in a fashion that must have been intolerably galling. He fastened, for instance, on the “Archæological Fly-Leaves” (mainly compiled by the late George Godwin, F.S.A.), in which the manager was wont to set forth the authorities for the costume and scenery of his revivals, and poked remorseless fun at their laborious pedantry. In short, the reader will find abundant evidence in the text and footnotes of this volume, from p. 172 onwards, that Vivian never let his vendetta sleep. I may refer particularly to the article entitled “The True Charles Kean at Last!” (p. 195) and to the footnote appended to it. Knowing that he had a man of quite abnormal susceptibility to deal with (“Poor fellow! poor fellow!” he says, “to be so sensitive—and an actor!”), Lewes would have shown more generosity had he sometimes held his hand.

Of the four critics represented in these volumes, Lewes alone has anything of note to say upon the principles of dramatic composition, as a living art. He was himself, as we have seen, much more of a playwright than any of the other three. Hazlitt did not dabble at all in the drama; Forster’s juvenile attempt counts for nothing; and Leigh Hunt did not become a dramatic author till after he had ceased to be a dramatic critic. Lewes, then, had a special and personal interest in the art of the playwright which his predecessors lacked; but he had also much more attractive matter for discussion. The modern drama, the drama as we know it to-day, was just coming into existence, or rather was just making its existence felt in England. It originates in Scribe—of that there can be no doubt. The modern prose drama of Europe to-day is either a development from,

or a reaction against, the methods of that astounding craftsman. He introduced a new order of technique, revealed new possibilities of manipulation; and those who come after, though they may deliberately reject both his doctrine and his practice, cannot ignore them. It is the strongest proof of Lewes's essential modernness that he foresaw from the first, and may be said instinctively to have headed, the reaction against Scribe. We should scarcely have held it to his discredit had he been dazzled by the exceeding cleverness of such a play as *Adrienne Lecouvreur*; but he was not for a moment. In his treatment of the play on its first performance in London (p. 88) he stands well abreast of M. Lemaître and far ahead of M. Sarcey. As regards the elder Dumas, too, (pp. 144 and 183) and Victor Hugo (p. 191), his attitude is essentially that of to-day. The fact is, he was too deeply versed in the masterpieces of dramatic literature—Greek, English, Spanish, French, German—to be carried away either by the showy action, the perpetual movement, of Scribe and Dumas, or by the flamboyant rhetoric of Hugo. The frivolous Vivian is never tired of protesting against what he calls the Fast School of criticism, meaning thereby not the slangy and horsey confraternity (the close kinship between Sport and the Drama was not yet formally recognised) but rather the school which openly despised poetry and psychology on the stage, and cared for nothing but facile amusement and sensation. It was Lewes, I believe, who added to the vocabulary of dramatic criticism that much-abused but now indispensable word, psychology. On the other hand, we see in his protests against Wardour Street Elizabethanism (pp. 101 and 118) how clearly he felt the necessity for an abandonment of the old rhetorical conventions, so hopelessly unfitted for the interpretation of



modern life and thought. It is much to be regretted that he laid down his critical pen just as the dramatists of the Second Empire were coming to the front. He mentions the younger Dumas only to protest against the immorality of *La Dame aux Camélias* (p. 240), and the one play of Augier's which he notices is his quite unimportant and uncharacteristic work, *Diane*.<sup>1</sup> It is true that even if he had continued his critical work in London, our sagacious habit of ignoring all foreign plays that cannot be "adapted" and anglicised would have excluded from his official cognizance the real masterpieces of the Second Empire movement. If he could have been permanently transplanted to Paris in 1854, and commissioned to follow the French stage as closely as he had hitherto followed the English, we should have had a body of criticism of unique interest and value.

Lewes was probably the most highly-trained thinker who ever applied himself to the study of theatrical art in England. It was a happy chance which superadded to his other gifts that innate passion for the stage which is the condition precedent of helpful dramatic criticism. The Editors of this volume, too, venture to regard it as a happy chance for them and for their readers that in the four years of Lewes's critical campaign, such an unusual, and probably unprecedented, number of the greatest dramas in the world should have passed over the London stage. Shakespeare apart—and even of Shakespeare Vivian saw considerably more than a critic of to-day would be likely to see in the same space of time—we have here notices of the *Antigone*, of *The Duchess of Malfi*, of *Polyeucte* and *Horace*, of *Phèdre*, *Bajazet*, and *Andromaque*, of *Emilia Galotti*, of *Faust* and *Egmont*, of

<sup>1</sup> He writes of *Maître Guérin* in a paper on "The Drama in Paris, 1865," in *Actors and Acting*, p. 178.

*Die Räuber, Kabale und Liebe, and Wilhelm Tell.* Thus he gives us, as it were, an unsystematic survey of the drama of the world from Sophocles to Scribe. And if we have not the record of any very superlative English acting, we have vivid and enthusiastic portraiture of the great Frédérick and the greater Rachel.

Vivian continued at his post until the middle of 1854, when George Henry Lewes and Marian Evans cast in their lot together. In September and October of that year, Vivian writes some letters from Weimar, and in December there appears an article on "Theatricals in Berlin," signed L. After his return to England, the course of his life is well known. He gave only intermittent attention to the stage; but there is ample evidence in *Actors and Acting* that his love for it was never wholly extinguished. In 1867 he edited for Brockhaus of Leipzig two volumes of *Selections from the Modern British Dramatists*, containing Bulwer's *Lady of Lyons*, *Money* and *Richelieu*, Knowles's *Virginius*, *Hunchback*, and *Love Chase*, Leigh Hunt's *Legend of Florence*, Jerrold's *Bubbles of the Day*, *Prisoners of War*, and *Rent Day*, Talfourd's *Ion*, Boucicault's *London Assurance*, Planché's *Fortunio*, Oxenford's *Twice Killed*, and Taylor and Reade's *Masks and Faces*. In the preface to this collection he says: "About twenty years ago the 'Decline of the Drama' was a question much debated in books, pamphlets, prefaces, and periodicals. So deep is the decline that nowadays it has even ceased to be a subject of discussion." One cannot but wonder whether, if he were alive to-day, he would modify this remark—and, if so, in what sense?

WILLIAM ARCHER.

CRITICISMS  
FROM THE "*EXAMINER*"  
(1835-1838).

BY  
JOHN FORSTER.



## CRITICAL ESSAYS.

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### MACREADY AS MACBETH.

*October 4, 1835.*

*Macbeth* was played on Thursday,<sup>1</sup> to one of the greatest, as well as one of the best and most intelligent audiences, we ever remember to have seen. On Mr. Macready's entrance the applause was tremendous. The pit rose and welcomed him, as the last of the tragic kings of our time, returned to his proper dominions, had a right to be welcomed. The same fervent demonstrations were repeated throughout, and he was forced before the curtain at the close, to have them again showered personally upon him.

Mr. Macready eminently deserved all this.<sup>2</sup> For he can grapple toughly with Shakespeare's genius at its highest, though he cannot master it. Who has yet mastered *Macbeth*? The greatest actors on record have only succeeded in particular scenes; and the stage has, indeed,

<sup>1</sup> At Drury Lane, October 1, 1835. This was the opening night of Macready's engagement with Bunn, which ended in a bout of fisticuffs between manager and tragedian on April 28, 1836.

<sup>2</sup> Macready in his *Diary* gives a most depressing account of his playing this evening.

seemed to have expressed hitherto (what, it must be confessed, it is best fitted to express) the outward tumult and disorder of his mind, his murder of Duncan and Banquo, his usurpation and cruel treachery, rather than anything of the source whence all this came. In Macbeth destiny surmounts passion. He cannot give way to the one, for the other overawes and blasts him. What is it to him that he knows and can feel the value of humanity and virtue? What is it to him that he wishes his age to be accompanied with honour, love, obedience, troops of friends? Destiny has struck him with its fatal arm, and he can only reel and stagger on in struggling obedience to its mysterious promptings. The mere human heart, as it throbs universally, is not the scene of *his* struggles, which have to do with fate and metaphysical aid. With him, too, towards all this, the pomp of circumstance is essential, and we cannot quite apply to him the majestic lines of Wordsworth:—

“Exchange the shepherd’s frock of native grey  
For robes with regal purple tinged ; convert  
The crook into a sceptre, give the pomp  
Of circumstance, and here the tragic Muse  
Shall find apt subjects for her highest art.  
Amid the groves, beneath the shadowy hills,  
The generations are prepared ; the pangs,  
The internal pangs are ready ; *the dread strife*  
*Of poor humanity’s afflicted will*  
*Struggling in vain with ruthless destiny.*”

But conceive this “afflicted will” exalted, and its passion made more mighty, by preternatural and portentous visions, and the last of these lines express Macbeth. With him imagination takes the place of sensibility and marshals him on his terrible way. His language and manner is not that of a man with a human will yet surviving to him, or merely

restless with the agony of human thoughts:—"skiey influences"<sup>1</sup> have taken from him this natural aspect, and left him, in return for that and for his earthly possession of good which they have snatched away for ever, a more than mortal consciousness of the wonders, terrors, and beauties that exist in the worlds of intellect and imagination. With Macbeth's knowledge of good and evil, and the general bearing of his character, he would have no shadow of reason or excuse for his cruelty or his ambition, if his manner were not that of one marked by the irresistible hand of Fate, invested with an air of poetical fantasy, moving about in the midst of shadows, and surrounded more grandly by a regalia of wonderful thoughts than by the common attributes of a robe and sceptre. We would have the actor of Macbeth, therefore, play the character like one in an excited dream, with an air of wildness and imaginary grandeur, and with as little as possible of mere human emotion.

Now, this is not exactly the way in which Mr. Macready plays throughout, though it is occasionally (as in passages of the fifth act and immediately before the murder-scene) expressed by him to admiration. The fault of the performance, we should say, generally was this:—that where it was imaginative, its imagination seemed to result from passion; while, where it was passionate, its passion was not the result, nor did it seem under the control, of imagination. Mr. Macready's passion requires something actual to grapple with. He would rather think his eyes the fools o' the other senses, than worth all the rest.<sup>2</sup> His imagination

<sup>1</sup> "A breath thou art,  
Servile to all the skiey influences."

—*Measure for Measure*, iii. 1.

<sup>2</sup> "Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses,  
Or else worth all the rest."

—*Macbeth*, ii. 1.



requires the relief of objects, and his feelings hurry on to action. He spoke the lines immediately before the murder, for instance, with a ghastly expression of imaginative terror, instead of a sustained and unearthly grandeur; instead of, by their assistance, drawing each corporal agent to the feat, and rising to a more than mortal impulse out of a world of immortal shadows.

But the early part of this soliloquy was majestic as well as awful, and the manner and words with which he dismissed Seyton were as fine as anything could possibly have been. His appearance then, as he stood before speaking—like a man on the verge of fate—proclaimed what was to come. At the conclusion of the soliloquy he *disappeared* into the chamber. His walk was ghastly<sup>1</sup> and impalpable. In all the horrors which succeed, Mr. Macready was indeed supreme. Here for a time the spectral phantasmagoria of the drama yield to its frightful realities, and the actor threw into them the most tremendous expression of which the stage is capable. It was, indeed, the body as well as the soul of agony, the fearfullest action of passion, the deeper and deeper still! Mr. Macready's broken and terrifying whispers fell with cold and death-like abruptness on the hearts of all—in the nearest and in the remotest corners of the theatre.

In that noble scene of the third act, where Macbeth meditates the murder of Banquo, and first shows the wonderful distinction marked by Shakespeare between his own mind and that of Lady Macbeth, Mr. Macready fell flat. We have had occasion to remark this before. This is where Macbeth summons up all his helps of poetry and fancy, and ascends in the majesty of his determination far above his wife, who, having attained the purpose of her

<sup>1</sup> *Sic.* Query: *ghostly*?

womanly will, without imagination or strong reason to sustain her, becomes weak and vacillating, loses her senses, walks in her sleep, and dies wretchedly.

*Macbeth.* There's comfort yet ; they are assailable ;  
Then be thou jocund : ere the bat hath flown  
His cloister'd flight ; ere, to black Hecate's summons,  
The shard-borne beetle, with his drowsy hums,  
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done  
A deed of dreadful note.

*Lady Macbeth.* What's to be done ?

*Macbeth.* Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,  
Till thou applaud the deed.—Come, seeling night,  
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day ;  
And, with thy bloody and invisible hand,  
Cancel, and tear to pieces, that great bond  
Which keeps me pale !—Light thickens ; and the crow  
Makes wing to the rooky wood :  
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse ;  
While night's black agents to their prey do rouse.  
Thou marvel'st at my words——.

Now Mr. Macready delivered these lines in an ordinary way, without any absorbing sense of their beauty, and without that air of consciousness they seem to wish to imply, that Nature herself was preparing to assist him in the committal of some mighty but irresistible wrong,—a vain persuasion to himself that in what he was about to do he only obeyed a kind of general summons, in common with other ministers of worldly evil, from an unseen and unearthly sphere.

In the banquet scene Mr. Macready rose again. We never saw him play this so finely as on the other evening. His agony during the presence of the ghost was not less fearful than the horror-stricken perplexity, the rigid bewilderment, that succeeded. His voice, as well as his entire

soul, sunk under the weight of the ghastly visitation. He did not bully Banquo "as some players do." And here we may remark that the objection urged by the critics against the frequent lowering of Mr. Macready's voice, should be levelled at the vulgar necessities of the stage. The fault of this fine actor is, that he is unable at all times to sacrifice his author to his audience. We do not say that he should not do so, but the fault should be fairly expressed. The few words at the conclusion of this scene, "we are yet but young in deed," were given with a profoundly beautiful expression, and the mode in which he left the stage at its close with his wife was one of the peculiar triumphs of his art. It fell into natural and sublime contrast with an effect of the same description, practised by the actor at the close of the first meeting of the guilty pair.

But, unquestionably, Mr. Macready's greatest achievement in this tragedy is the fifth act, which he bears up magnificently from its commencement to its close. Every point of his meeting with Macduff tells with the deepest truth of character; the easy triumph with which he throws off his sword and talks of his charmed life; the agonised and hopeless despair with which he afterwards avoids him; the fiend-like desperation with which he rushes back upon his weapon! The fight is a rich succession of gladiatorial pictures expressive of the sublime will and imagination of Macbeth,—strengthened and made more sublime by the approach of death. Nothing can possibly be grander than his manner of returning, with that regal stride, after he has received his mortal thrust, to fall again on Macduff's sword in yielding weakness. The spirit fights, but the body sinks in mortal faintness. Still, as it sinks, Macbeth survives! and Mr. Macready's attitude in falling, when he thrusts his sword into the ground, and

by its help for one moment raises himself to stare into the face of his opponent with a gaze that seemed to concentrate all Majesty, Hate and Knowledge, had an air of the preternatural fit to close such a career !

## MACREADY AS HAMLET.

October 11, 1835.

MR. MACREADY'S Hamlet is a noble and a beautiful performance.<sup>1</sup> It is infinitely finer than it used to be, more subtle and various, multiplied and deepened in its lights and shadows, with its sudden and brilliant effects harmonised to the expression of profound feeling, lofty yet gentle, the grandest sustainment of imagination and sensibility we have ever witnessed on the stage. We considered Mr. Macready highly successful in this character before seeing him last Wednesday, yet he illustrated then what it is to study Shakespeare with a love unwearied by success. But genius may well be its own rival, for it has no other. We venture to think, without a shade of misgiving, that this performance was the noblest approach that the *stage* can present to Hamlet, as he exists in the wonderful creativeness of Shakespeare's fancy. Vivid delineations of moments of passion, we have seen equally fine, fragments of possibly superior beauty in the acting of the late Mr. Kean—but never such a grasp of thought, never such a sustained exhibition of single, profound, and enduring passion, cast in the yielding and varying mould of imagination. Mr. Macready was indeed the princely and heart-broken philosopher, the irresolute avenger, the friend of Horatio, the lover of Ophelia.

<sup>1</sup> Drury Lane, October 7, 1835.

Hamlet is more than this, it is true; but we must recollect the palpable intervention of the stage. Mr. Macready cannot exhibit that which "passeth show." We try in vain to conceive of an actor that should present with effect the exact Hamlet of Shakespeare. There is that in it, considered deeply in the closet, with which eye, and tone, and gesture have nothing to do. Supposing we had an actor who could subdue all sense of his art, could consent to sacrifice all dramatic point, all severe<sup>1</sup> effect, all brilliant antitheses of action,—who, with grace, wit, chivalrous and princely bearing, profound intellect, and a high faculty of imagination, could yet merge all these in a struggle of sensibility, of weakness, and of melancholy, and bear them with him about the stage, "like sweet bells jangled, out of tune and harsh,"—suppose such an actor upon the stage, who, with these accomplishments, chooses to show them only in such a struggle, using them unconsciously, and to himself not to others—who abstracts himself from the audience, the actors, and the theatre, and, wrapped in a veil of subtle intellectual refinement, only, as it were, reflects aloud,—supposing, we say, all this, which might alone serve to the realisation of the book Hamlet, of his solitary musings, his silent thoughts, his "light-and-noise-abhorring ruminations,"<sup>2</sup> we are more than half-inclined to think that his audience might fancy he had little business where he was, and take to hissing the pointless and unprecise performance. We do not say they would be wrong. The necessities of his art limit the sway of the actor. It is evident to us that Mr. Macready has as true and profound a sense of the character of Hamlet as it would be possible to entertain, and that where he sacrifices anything of this,

<sup>1</sup> *Sic.* Query: *scenic*?

<sup>2</sup> Lamb *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare.*



he is only surrendering to his art as much as is necessary to secure its own triumph. He is the Hamlet of our fancies reconciled to our waking thoughts. For this we pardon an occasional over-display of the resources of his art, such as Hamlet might never have indulged.

The impassioned and heart-breaking sorrow with which Mr. Macready opened the play in the first soliloquy was a noble foundation for the entire structure of the character. This quick and passionate sensibility he never lost sight of, whether under the influence of supernatural visiting, or goaded by the desire of earthly vengeance. If Mr. Macready's performance had suddenly closed in the soliloquy of "Oh! what a rogue and peasant slave am I," at the words—

"Bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, KINDLESS villain!"

we should have needed no better assurance of the power of his genius to cope with this wonderful character. Where he tempers this quick sensibility during his intercourse with Horatio, with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and with Ophelia, by the gentleness of the scholar, the schoolfellow, the friend and the lover, we feel the apologies that are due for the weaknesses and inconsistencies of Hamlet. In all this Mr. Macready, as it seemed to us, touched the highest point of perfection. His affection for Horatio and his reliance on his judgment were marked and exclusive, and throughout excellently sustained—in the third act more especially, during the progress of the Play-scene, and at last in the agonies of his death, when his care is chiefly for him. In his intercourse with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, Mr. Macready happily kept up the quiet demeanour of conscious detection, of cool observance yet friendly familiarity,

hitting one of the very nicest points in Hamlet, without the intrusion of any violence or severe abruptness. We shall never forget the tone with which he broke into "What a piece of work is man!" so earnest in its faith, and so passionate in its sorrow. Here is the true Hamlet. No wonder the shock of this outraged sense of good should drive him nearly mad. "That ever he was born to set it right!" No wonder his purpose failed by "thinking too precisely on the event!" No wonder that, even with his motive and his cue for action, he should remain indolent and undecided, "unpregnant of his cause and can do nothing"—excess of thought absorbing his faculty of action. If ever this was expressed on the stage, it was expressed by Mr. Macready. If ever the subtle madness of Hamlet, which is not madness, and yet not an assumption, which might rather stand for the over-subtle workings of the intellect, for the awful though quiet action of the *sources* of wit and madness, passing through the brain alone, and witnessed only in changes of metaphysical emotion, and in the dejected ruins of a noble presence and universal accomplishment, "blasted by ecstasy"—if ever this was presented upon the stage, it was presented by this great actor. His scene with Ophelia was truly exquisite. It was the realisation of Mr. Lamb's opinion,<sup>1</sup> that the scene is "a profound artifice of love, to alienate Ophelia by affected discourtesies, so to prepare her mind for the breaking off of that loving intercourse, which can no longer find a place amidst business so serious as that which he has to do." It was indeed not alienation, but distraction purely, and such it made itself felt by her—not anger, but grief assuming the appearance of anger—love awkwardly counterfeiting hate, "as sweet countenances when they try to frown."

<sup>1</sup> *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare.*



In the scene with the Ghost, Mr. Macready still sustained the burthen of this surpassing character. Nothing could be more true than his restless walk up and down on the platform before the terrible appearance, or than the solemn and awful effect of his adjuration afterwards. He sinks before that preternatural visitation. The burst of human energy he gives way to, when his friends endeavour to oppose him, was, as a momentary wild relief, and in the bold and awful contrast into which it throws the "Go on, I'll follow thee," extremely grand and effective. The variety, the power, and the brilliant animation of the play-scene were daring and fine to the last degree. His manner of turning from Horatio, as he hears the approaching footsteps of the King—"They are coming to the play, I must be idle,"—his quick and salient walk up and down the front of the stage, waving his handkerchief as if in idle and gay indifference,<sup>1</sup> but ill concealing, at that instant, the sense of an approaching triumph—was one of those things Shakespeare himself would have done had he acted Hamlet. The whole scene was masterly; its bitterness fearful—"your Majesty and we that have free souls, it touches *us* not!"—and its energy quite appalling. Mr. Macready made us feel, what is literally the case with Hamlet, that his power exhausts itself here. His attitude as the King hurries off, was a noble commentary on that subtle purpose of Shakespeare. As he stands there, in the flushed excitement of a triumph, we feel that he is satisfied with the discovery alone. It was an earnest to Horatio and to all, that that confirmation of his suspicions was all he sought, that the success of his experiment was his greatest aim, and that to *act* upon it was as far from his thoughts as ever. In the same exquisite

<sup>1</sup> This was the action which Forrest, the American actor, hissed. He called it a *pas de mouchoir*.

apprehensiveness of Shakespeare was the loud bullying of himself, to thrust down the thought which would at once have disabled his act, as he rushed to stab through the arras,—and his fine, breathless change of tone, as he rushes back with “Is it the King?” This scene, and his conduct to his mother throughout, was marked by profound discrimination.

If we might hazard an objection to a performance so truly great as this, it would be to the delivery of the celebrated Soliloquy on Death, as too quiet and deliberate, and to the reception and intercourse with the players, as not sufficiently familiar. Why did not Mr. Macready recognise them cordially, at least his “old friend,”—for does not Hamlet shake hands with his schoolfellows before the players enter, and assign as his reason, “lest my extent to the players, which, I tell you, must show fairly outward, should more appear like entertainment than yours?” He has his reason for this familiarity, as he has reasons for all he does, and for all he does not do.

This praise of ours, which we have meant to be as enthusiastic as it is sincere, we have yet felt to be inadequate to the occasion. We conclude as we began by characterising Mr. Macready’s performance of Hamlet as the most perfect achievement of the modern stage—in depth, in originality, in truth, in beauty, and in grandeur of sustainment. Its expression is altogether equal to its conception.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Macready’s own note on this performance is, “Acted Hamlet, to judge by the continued interest and the uniform success of all the striking passages, better than I ever played it before. Forster . . . thought it, as a whole, the best he had ever seen.”

## MACREADY AS OTHELLO.

*October 25, 1835.*

MR. MACREADY, for the first time these many years, played Othello.<sup>1</sup> The late Mr. Kean had taken such complete possession of this character, that it was wise to decline contesting it with him. It was indeed a great performance; one by the help of which the actor might have trusted to live beyond the gratitude and the tears of his own time, had it been the happier destiny of his art to leave a lasting image for posterity. How often does Cibber's regret rise to one's lips, that the animated graces of the player can live no longer than the instant breath and motion which present them, or can at best but faintly glimmer through the memory of a few surviving spectators! Kean's Othello is now only the remembrance of an amazing picture of sublimity and woe.

But yet it may be that, being only a cherished remembrance, it even sets a living performance at an unfair disadvantage. A fond and doting retrospect of the past makes us more than commonly fastidious with the present. It is as difficult to admit a new enthusiasm, a second idolatry, as to contest with an old and delightful prejudice. Mr. Macready's Othello must, nevertheless, win golden opinions from all, and the rising race of playgoers will possibly come to consider it the most astonishing elevation of anguished passion into a fixed and sublime despair that they have ever been permitted to behold.

Mr. Macready's performance is deficient in the early

<sup>1</sup> Drury Lane, October 21, 1835.

scenes.<sup>1</sup> They want the quiet and graceful self-possession, the measureless dignity, and those touches of happy yet mournful pathos with which they were so finely marked by Mr. Kean. The meeting at Cyprus, for instance, was not nearly so good; for though Mr. Macready has the subtle imaginative power, in common with Mr. Kean, of adorning a passage of poetry, even while it is telling home in its pathos, with some harmonious image besides of tender or of awful beauty,—yet in his speech of welcome to Desdemona, when he tells her that if it were then to die, 'twere then to be most happy, we did not recognise, as in the manner of Mr. Kean, that Othello's content of joy was indeed too absolute, and that an unconscious foreboding hung 'round the blissful words, intimating misery to follow. Mr. Macready missed too, as we thought, that exquisite picture of personal affection struggling with duty, which his predecessor conveyed in—"How comes it, Michael, *you* are thus forgot?" And we must add, that in stopping as he left the scene to utter an additional severity to Cassio in a few words plucked from their context—"Michael, I'll make thee an example"—Mr. Macready was clearly wrong. Othello had already done violence to himself in saying so much, nor would he have added another word, but that in hurrying from the scene he is met by Desdemona, and a concern for her takes place of all things else—

"Look, if my gentle love be not rais'd up,  
I'll make thee an example"—

if Mr. Macready therefore judged fit to restore anything he should have restored all.<sup>2</sup> These things may seem trifling,

<sup>1</sup> Macready notes in his Diary, "In the early scenes I was abroad, making effort, but not feeling my audience."

<sup>2</sup> See p. 19.

but they are not so. The sublimity of the after-suffering of Othello issues as much out of those kindly springs and impulses which make up his ordinary and educated being, in its tenderness, its restraint, its simplicity, and its trust,—as out of the swelling and bursting forth of his African blood. With the latter it was, however, that the greatness of Mr. Macready's performance began, and in this it was at times even greater than Mr. Kean's. It had more magnificence of style about it. There was unquestionably something of the gipsy in Mr. Kean,—Mr. Macready was all the Moor. There was a swelling grandeur in his passion that seemed to lift him occasionally to the stature of a giant, and he swept across the stage, an agitated and a fearful Form!

This is that characteristic in Mr. Macready's Othello, which strikes at once as the evidence of his genius. It almost absorbs the recollection of his passages of pathos, which were in themselves extremely beautiful, yet occasionally, from their contrast with the grander and more effulgent passion, had a somewhat pitiable effect. In the famous lines, for instance, commencing "Had it pleased Heaven to try me with affliction," we could fancy his tears heavily rolling down the face,—as Mr. Kean spoke them, we seemed to see those waters of misery standing and quivering in the eyes. The last is the finest thing. But in the succeeding speech how very grand Mr. Macready was! We mean that where he speaks of the wind being hushed in the hollow mine of earth, that it might not hear the crime of Desdemona. The eastern amplitude and gorgeousness of Othello were never so magnificently given. So with the description of the Handkerchief. So also with the cries to Vengeance and Hate, in which there were indeed "aspicks' tongues." The various and electrical



transitions of the great scenes in the third act were never, we should say, presented with a more passionate grandeur, and with so little, at the same time, of common fierceness.<sup>1</sup> The crowning and consummation of the whole was nobly effected, by the overpowering suddenness of the "Never, Iago! By yond' marble heaven——!"

Mr. Macready's last act was, we think, finer than Mr. Kean's. Of late years, indeed, Mr. Kean had always so much exhausted himself in the previous acts, that he was obliged to rest on a sofa during his fearful dialogue with Desdemona, to gather strength for the murder. We never felt this as other than disgusting; for the only thing that palliates the deed, is the awful tumult and excitement of passion in the midst of which it is committed. Now this was indeed expressed by Mr. Macready, whose management of the murder itself, and whose ghastly and tremendous appearance after it—suddenly starting with extended arms through the curtain that had been drawn over the deed—were in the highest possible taste and knowledge of his art, and in knowledge too of that characteristic of nature which gives to the imagination a more terrible seeing than to the eye. We never saw a more complete effect—it was too fearful, if such an objection may be urged. We were startled indeed on the first night by a striking addition to its reality, for a woman in the pit had hysterically fainted. In the milder passages of agonised misery which occur towards the conclusion, Mr. Macready was equally great. His fixed wretchedness of despair when he tells Iago he would have him live; his profoundly affecting shame when he is asked if he had consented to Cassio's death; and his

<sup>1</sup> "Though not up to my own expectations in the 'Farewell,' etc., yet in the grand burst I carried the house with me."—*Macready's Diary*.



"I do believe it, and I ask your pardon," were all most supremely beautiful. But we shall be able on some future occasion to recur to this scene, in connection with other points of the performance.

## FORREST AS OTHELLO.

October 30, 1836.

MR. FORREST,<sup>1</sup> the American actor, appeared on Monday last in the character of Othello.<sup>2</sup> The performance was, in our opinion (though likely to be effective, in a certain way, with the public), decisive against his claims as a first-rate tragedian. We regret to be obliged to say this, for we feel that power, or even the remote promise of power, is not so common upon the stage, that we should coldly question or rashly dismiss its possessor. It was for this reason, among others, that we did not choose to express all the doubts we felt on Mr. Forrest's first appearance, but preferred to "reserve anything like a final opinion till we had seen him in one of the great English plays." We have so seen him, and will now state without reserve the exact impression he made upon us. National politeness, so to speak, has nothing to do with a question of this sort. There is a vicious style in art which the public taste should be

<sup>1</sup> Edwin Forrest (born March 9, 1806—died December 12, 1872) was one of the most noted of American actors, though remarkable rather for physical than for mental gifts. This was his first visit to England, his opening character being Spartacus in *The Gladiator*, which he played on 17th October. On this visit he made a great social success, but on his second visit he was not well received, owing, he erroneously believed, to the influence of Macready.

<sup>2</sup> At Drury Lane, October 24, 1836.

carefully guarded against, and Mr. Forrest is one of its professors.

In the second scene of the tragedy, when Othello's officers draw their swords upon the party of Brabantio, the brave and tranquil General quietly rebukes their haste with this simple and dignified remark: "Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it Without a prompter." Mr. Forrest, after indulging in a fencer's attitude, turned round with a pointed sneer to Cassio and Iago—"Were it my cue—to *fight*!—I should have *known* it—without—a *prompter*!"

In the scene of the council chamber, where devilish arts and practices are charged against Othello, he, still tranquil as a child, describes in a soldier-like unvarnished fashion, the birth of Desdemona's love, and the sentiment with which she inspired his grave and manly breast, by her pity of his toils and dangers. The beauty of Othello's moral attitude in this scene consists in its assured quiet and, as it were, picturesque dignity. Now, Mr. Forrest began the speech with an affected appeal to the excellence of his judges. It was just as Sir James Scarlett used to address his twelve friends of a jury-box. "My very noble—and approved—*good*—masters!" Where some opportunity for a "point" of this sort failed to present itself, Mr. Forrest laboured through the lines as if he had to pump up for the especial occasion every thought they conveyed. When he came to the "And often did beguile her of her *tears*," he intonated the last word as if a whine were necessary to give it meaning.

Immediately before the grand passion of the play opens, Shakespeare has seized an opportunity, in his infinite art and wisdom, to show the weak point through which he means to strike at Othello. The scene of his interference in the night-brawl at Cyprus betrays a slight bubbling up of

his African blood. We catch a glimpse here of the true state of his apparently all-tranquil temper. The educated restraint is thrown off for an instant. In this scene also, in the personal affection with which his sense of duty struggles towards Cassio, we recognise those kindly springs and impulses which make up the ordinary and educated being of the Venetian General, and from the fancied outrage of which, as much as from the swelling and bursting forth of his red Moorish blood, the sublimity of his after-suffering issues. Mr. Forrest missed the truth in both these points. Throughout the scene he was perversely tame, and at the close of it, by way of indulging an unnecessary harshness against Cassio, or rather, we suppose, by way of making an effective "exit," he plucked a few words from Shakespeare's context and flung them at his poor Lieutenant: "Michael—I'll make thee—an example!" Why, the kind-hearted General had already done violence to his personal attachment in his touching dismissal of Cassio, nor would have wounded him by another word, but that, as he hurries from the scene, he is met by Desdemona, and a concern for her comfort takes place of all things else—"Look, if my gentle love be not raised up;—I'll make thee an example." If Mr. Forrest has a taste to restore any part of this, we beg of him to wake up Desdemona, and to restore all.<sup>1</sup>

In the early part of the great scene of the third act, we observe it as another proof of Shakespeare's exquisite penetration, that it is only with the gradual working of Iago's poison that Othello puts off the civilised restraints of his rank. Mr. Forrest defeated this at once by familiarly grasping the hand of his Ancient at the words, "And—for I know thou art full of love and honesty."—He should

<sup>1</sup> See p. 14. Salvini made a striking effect out of the entrance of Desdemona in this scene.

have reserved this for that convulsive movement of controlled agony with which Othello afterwards murmurs, "I am bound to thee for ever!"

As the fearful third act proceeds, Othello makes several desperate efforts to keep down his passions. From the first he has an instinct of the consequence, if they are suffered to rise up in rebellion against him. It is not that he loses a wife, but that every tie which binds him to the earth, whether of feeling or of habit, will perish also. The heyday of Othello's youth, we are to recollect, is over. The tree has taken the decisive bend. It will no longer yield and recover itself with the crushing or retreating passion—it must stand as it is, or be rooted up utterly. The actor who supposes Othello to be simply a jealous man has not read Shakespeare. Jealousy is not the grand feature of his passion. His love for Desdemona, as we see it in the early scenes, and as we hear himself so exquisitely describe it in its origin, is presented to us rather as that principle of virtue, tenderness, and affectionate admiration of beauty and good, into which all the hopes and habits of an active life have at length settled down, and which is to carry him happily and calmly, and with a tranquil mind, through the "vale of years." To attack this, to weaken his faith in this, is at once to show him beneath his feet a tremendous yawning grave.

Let the reader, keeping this in mind, hear how Mr. Forrest conveyed it. Every passage in his third and fourth acts was broken up into little fierce bursts of passion, contrasted with heavy drawlings of tenderness. Wherever a word occurred for what appeared to be "a point," the word was wrenched from its place in the passion to suffer the point to have way. Whatever the immediate colour of the language might happen to be, that was given without regard to the general harmony and toning of the sentiment. An

equal stress was laid, as it were, on every visible impression. One sense was never suffered to be interpreted by another and different sense. The performance was made up of an infinite variety of parts, through which there was no unity. They were never, as by the imagination or kindled fancy of a man of real genius, flung into a state of fusion. In a word, for this is the only conclusion we can come to, Mr. Forrest had no intellectual comprehension of what he was about. All he showed was, that he had very closely watched the celebrated performance of Mr. Kean,<sup>1</sup> that he had brought away from it only the more vulgar and obvious points, and that, with certain physical requisites, his notion of the stage appeared to have been formed on the supposition that the intellectual part of an audience was to be reached, from such a distance, through the physical alone. Sound was substituted for sense through every portion of these great scenes. Where a tender word occurred it was spoken tenderly; where a fierce word, fiercely. Mr. Forrest never seemed beyond control. All he said and did was said and done mechanically. The most ordinary temptation to a pause or a point was seized. "For she had—eyes—and chose me!" When he spoke of his decline into years—"Yet, that's not much"—he whined;—then he gave the "She's gone! I am abused!" etc., in the rigid and compressed style of Kean;—then at the thought of "these delicate creatures," we had tones which were meant to be tenderly sweet;—and finally, by way of winding up with a striking effect at the close of the tremendous "I'd rather be a toad," etc., Mr. Forrest literally sprang back with the

<sup>1</sup> Forrest was undoubtedly influenced very greatly by Edmund Kean. On Kean's second visit to America, Forrest, then young and impressionable, played "seconds" to the great actor during his engagement at Albany.



demivolte of a fencer up the stage, and, catching his glimpse of the coming Desdemona, threw himself into a sort of tenderly gladiatorial position, and waited for the volleys of applause that broke from the stalls and the galleries. We are within the correction of any one who was present, if this is not a literal description of Othello's soliloquy after the first great interview with Iago, as Mr. Forrest delivered it.

When Desdemona offers to bind Othello's forehead with her handkerchief, he puts her hand aside with the few words which are so affecting, when considered as a mere meaningless excuse for refusing to receive her kindness—"Your napkin is too little." Mr. Forrest made a "point" here, as usual. He thrust the handkerchief from her hand—pointed at it emphatically—"Your *napkin*"—(with the rigid Kean accent)—passed the forefinger with which he had been pointing at it over his brow—"is—too *little!*" What was meant here we cannot take upon ourselves to say—unless the General wished to intimate to his lady that she had planted certain ornaments on his forehead which her "napkin" could not conveniently compass.

If what we have said of the nature of Othello's passion be true, it is not possible to conceive anything less "pointed" than it is throughout. It is grand, concentrated, massive. It is a movement of life or death. We can conceive the passion of an ordinary jealousy full of points and peaks, and running into narrow nooks or estuaries,—but this is not the passion of Othello's jealousy. His whole being is at issue.

Beyond all things fearful and effulgent is this passion of the Moor when he rushes, like a roused tiger, on Iago, after he has delivered his grand farewell to the associations and affections of the past, and to all the hopes of the future. Yet here, as usual, Mr. Forrest attempted his points.



"Make me to see it——!" he shouts, then stops as if in disgust at what he has asked, and elaborately corrects himself—"or (at the least) so prove it," etc. And again:—"If thou dost slander *her*"—in a tone of African fierceness—"and torture me"—in accents of whining self-pity! Why, in such passages as these, Othello could no more stop the boiling of his blood to indulge such petty changes, than the path of the lightning could be stopped! His rage, like the lightning, rushes direct and rapid to its point, "shattering that it may reach, and shattering what it reaches!"

In Othello's after-cries to Vengeance and to Hate there is nothing but "aspicks' tongues." Not so with Mr. Forrest. He has room for tones of tenderness and sweetness even here. "Yield up, O Love," he says in the most affecting way, "thy crown, and hearted throne"—then, with sudden fierceness—"to tyrannous hate!" In the same fashion he cut up into little strips the gorgeousness and Eastern amplitude of the Moor's description of the handkerchief. Nay, more, he spoke this famous speech as though simply anxious that Desdemona should not lose (what he knew she had already fatally lost) the "magic web" of his mother's gift! "Take heed on't!" he exclaimed, in an earnest tone of tender entreaty,—then, changing to the rigid and fierce,—“make it a darling like your precious eye”—and so forth. To describe Mr. Forrest's performance of the scenes in the fourth act would be to weary the reader with repetition. They were all gone through on the same false principle, and with the same tardy and inefficient power of execution. They were made up of trite transitions, alternated by some slow stop-watch movement, or a dead pause—à la Kean. Now we had a line *con furio*, *con strepito*, then a passage in the *affettuoso* style,—a succession of extremes. We can compare Mr. Forrest's manner to

nothing better than to the marginal directions in a music-book. We are about as much affected by it, in relation to the reality of what it seeks to convey, as we should be by the exhibition of such directions instead of the divine and nobly modulated sounds they form the index to.

Some time since<sup>1</sup> we recollect expressing ourselves strongly on the mode in which Mr. Kean, during the later years of his life, used to play the last act of *Othello*. It was no fault in the conception of that great actor; it was simply the result of his physical infirmities. He had always so much exhausted himself in the previous acts that he was obliged to rest on a sofa during his fearful dialogue with Desdemona, to gather strength for the murder. It was impossible to feel this as other than disgusting; for the only circumstance that palliates the deed is the awful tumult and excitement of passion in the midst of which it is committed. Now Mr. Forrest improved on Mr. Kean's infirmity. The drawing up of the scene discovered him sitting quietly near the bed, soliloquising with deliberate calmness! As he uttered the dreadful words, "Have you pray'd to-night, Desdemona?"—he coolly retreated from the bed and sat down upon a sofa. The murder was a downright Old Bailey affair. We will not tax the reader's patience with any detailed description of the scene. It was full of the falsest seekings for effect. When, towards the close, Gratiano enters at Othello's entreaty, Mr. Forrest, having provided himself with a "sword of Spain" *loosened in the hilt*, threw himself into an attitude of defiance, and rattled the "ice-brook's temper" above his head! When Montano rushes to disarm him, after his attempt upon Iago, Mr. Forrest indulged in a short gladiatorial display of wrestling before he would surrender the weapon! When

<sup>1</sup> See p. 16.

Iago leaves the stage, Mr. Forrest, having put himself into a position to receive his sneering look, starts, makes his hands tremble violently (a point, as he seems to think, of very great virtue in the expression of passion), and turns shuddering away! When, in the last speech of all, he alludes to his "melting mood," Mr. Forrest drew his hand along his arm, as if to wipe off the tears that had fallen there! If our notice of this performance had been a mention of these things alone, it would have been decisive, we think, of the actor's utter want of imagination.

We have spoken thus of Mr. Forrest with much regret, because we had been led to expect better things of him, and it is always a more grateful task to praise than to blame. But it is a duty we owe to truth to write what we have written, and the rather as we see the exaggerated tone of praise assumed by our daily contemporaries. We trust that we have not resorted to any hidden or obscure generalities of censure. We have sought to be precise in the terms of this criticism, because, if we can be shown to have erred in any of the grounds on which we have formed our judgment, we shall only feel pleasure in acknowledging and correcting our error.

### FORREST AS KING LEAR.<sup>1</sup>

*November 6, 1836.*

MR. FORREST attempted Lear on Friday night,<sup>2</sup> and failed,

<sup>1</sup> Towards the close of Forrest's career, a journalist friend remarked to him one night, "I never saw you play Lear so well as you did to-night." Whereupon Forrest replied, "*Play* Lear! What do you mean, sir? I do not *play* Lear! I play Hamlet, Richard, Shylock, Virginius, if you please; but by God, sir, I *am* Lear!"—*Actors and Actresses*, edited by Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. iv.

<sup>2</sup> At Drury Lane, November 4, 1836.

we think, even more decisively than in Othello. We will point out, as briefly as we can, in what way he failed.

Mr. Forrest played Lear as a "foolish fond old man." He expressed weakness tolerably well; he shed an abundance of tears; he made the most of the feeble stare and the cold bewilderment of madness; and he walked about as a very old person might be supposed to walk. But this is not Lear, nor in any way allied with Lear. Lear is old, but the Heavens themselves are old, and in his sublime identification of his own age with theirs, we behold the sublime analogy of his sorrows. Issuing out of a great breach in nature, they assume a privilege of preternatural grandeur.

Mr. Forrest went through the first scene deliberately. We had little of the turbulent greatness or of the royal impatience of Lear. His delivery of the speeches beginning, "For by the sacred sun," etc.; "Peace, Kent!" etc.; and "Hear me, rash man!" etc., was in each case elaborately slow. Yet should the actor have taxed his art here to make the audience feel, in the infirmities of Lear's temper, how great was the consideration he needed, and how crushing and irrepressible was the strength of his sharp impatience.

Lear's question of Goneril, when the gulf first opens at his feet ("Are you our daughter?"), should have had a hideous and dream-like sound. Mr. Forrest put it as an ordinary interrogatory. In this scene the actor, to give proper effect to its last terrible imprecation, should have prepared the audience by ascending gradually through all its changes of agony, of anger, of impatience, of turbulent assertion, of despair, of mighty grief,—up to the height of his tremendous "argument." Now Mr. Forrest spoke every distinct speech as if it had a passion of its own and a purpose of its own to serve, which began and ended in itself.

The "Darkness and Devils," etc., was a mere succession of fierce tones interrupted by the most mistaken and misplaced tenderness; and the "Blasts upon thee," with its frightful threatening of the Curse, was delivered so slowly, and the speaker, at its close, had settled into such comparative calmness, that the Curse itself, suddenly following, appeared to have sprung on the instant from a bad and merely violent impulse of passion. Let the reader observe that this is a trick resorted to by Mr. Forrest as often as he can make it practicable, and that it is decisive of the commonplace actor. He severs abruptly the natural relation of two speeches to each other, with a view to producing sudden and violent effects. He does not produce them, but he startles the unthinking part of his audience into occasional applause.

Mr. Forrest threw himself on his knees, for the delivery of the curse, with fine effect. But he should have thrown his head completely back, instead of thrusting it forward. The terrible imprecation was afterwards given in an explosion of rapid and convulsive passion. No change was made even in the delivery of its closing lines. Need we point out the mistake in this? Lear's curse is not a frenzy of rage, nor an impetuous anathema of passionate hate. There is not a word in it that does not seem to have wrought its passage from a heart that was absolutely breaking in the effort. Its birth must surely have been amid heaving and reluctant throes of suffering and anguish. Its worst horrors are invoked by the most sacred images of love. Do we not hear them issue from a choking utterance, as if laden with fond associations unextinguishable even now? Let it not be forgotten that, in the original tragedy, the wretched father is made to return to the scene immediately after, shedding "hot tears."



Through the second act Mr. Forrest sunk deeper in his failure. Of all its varied and subtle passion, not a line, not one gradation, was given. The quick commencing anger to Glo'ster was delivered as an affectation of disbelief; the impetuous rage of the "Fiery? What quality?" etc., was given in a tone of pert satire; the sudden exclamation of "The dear father Would with his daughter speak, commands her service," was intonated with the softest tenderness; the first speech to Regan was the usual abrupt mixture of soft and harsh; the bitter irony with which he kneels to her, and the mingled agony and satire of his "Dear daughter, I confess that I am old," were merged into an actual supplication of pathetic want; his last anxious and tremblingly fearful tenderness—"No, Regan, thou shalt never have my curse"—was disfigured by a tone of coarse wheedling;—and when, on the entrance of Goneril, Lear makes his sublime appeal to the Heavens, Mr. Forrest delivered it in accents which were meant to be tender, touching, piteous! The closing speech of this stupendous scene takes all its effect from the previous effect of the scene itself. It is under the effort of bewildering passion with which at that moment Lear strives to burst through the phalanx of amazed horrors that have closed him round, that his great reason begins to fail him. But it is obvious that this wonderful burst must fail in its chief purpose, if the actor have not previously conveyed some sufficiently palpable idea of the circle of utter desolation in the midst of which Lear stands,—if his agony has not seemed full, if there has appeared room for still greater afflictions. This was necessarily the result of Mr. Forrest's previous acting in the scene, and therefore the grandest speech in the play, though by no means badly spoken, passed off without a particle of effect. With the scene of the storm an interest



begins which is almost purely intellectual. Hereafter all the little vexations of Lear's mortal temper are seen and felt no more. From the moment when he comes on the scene, amidst the thunder and the lightning, and tells the wind to blow, the thunder to rumble its bellyful, and the lightning to singe his white head,—from that moment the intellectual should almost entirely take place of the physical, in expressing the sufferings of Lear. For what is the poet's purpose? It is to show Lear, after having been plunged down the extremest depths of mortal desolation, rising up to "baffle the malice of daughters and of storms," even by the help of that vast wealth and strength of the immortal part of him, which the storm and convulsion of his disrupted affections had upturned from unconscious rest in the inner depths of his mind. He suddenly rushes up into gigantic proportions, loses his mere human infirmities, and "stands a proud monument in the gap of nature over barbarous cruelty and filial ingratitude." It may be said, and it will be most justly said, that the resources of the actor are too limited for the perfect expression of this. But some part of what we require at his hands, he is quite able to do. We would have him tighten and make rigid in those scenes every nerve of his frame, and elevate to its extremest point of elevation every burst of Lear's wandering intellect. Nothing should be feebly given. Everything is here at its utmost point of tension. Yet what did Mr. Forrest? He entered upon the scene slowly, and recited the "Blow wind," etc., with a deliberate and stop-watch emphasis which reminded us of our old exercises at the breaking-up of school! We will print his second speech precisely as he gave it—all the words marked by italics were uttered in very tender tones, while the words not so marked were spoken fiercely—

“ Rumble thy fill ! fight whirlwind, rain and fire !  
*Not fire, wind, rain, or thunder are my daughters:*  
*I tax not you, ye elements, with unkindness ;*  
*I never gave you kingdoms, called you children ;*  
*You owe me no obedience.*—Then let fall  
 Your horrible pleasure !—Here I stand your slave,  
*A poor, infirm, weak, and despis'd old man.*  
 Yet I will call you servile ministers,  
 That have with two pernicious daughters join'd  
*Your high engender'd battle 'gainst a head*  
*So old and white as this. Oh ! oh ! 'tis foul.”*<sup>1</sup>

The same alternation of senseless tones was continued to the close of the tragedy. Wherever a remote point for the expression of physical misery occurred it was thrown out before everything else. We saw nothing before us but a “foolish fond old man,” whom we wanted, as Mr. Lamb has said, “to take into shelter and to relieve.”

In the last of the mad scenes, when Mr. Forrest came to the passage, “Pull, pull off my boots,” he threw off one of his boots ! At the noble lines on Sin in the rich and poor, he forgot the delusions of his madness, and pointed with a straw at the words “A pigmy straw will pierce it !” These literal passages were but poor relief from the general serious deficiency in imagination. Some few passages in this scene, however, were the best delivered in the performance. His “every inch a king” was good, though mistaken in its spirit. For these words, we think, do not imply a clinging to the notion of rank, but rather a bitter satire the opposite way. Lear had discovered, in the midst of his madness, a

<sup>1</sup> We quote this wretched mutilation of Shakespeare with extreme disgust ; but it was so given by Mr. Forrest. [The first line, in Shakespeare, reads “Rumble thy bellyful ! spit, fire ! spurt, rain !” and in the fifth line Shakespeare wrote “subscription” instead of “obedience.” The other changes, though foolish, are unimportant.]

consciousness of intellectual grandeur before which the kingly condition was as nothing. Would not all recurrences to his old state after this, be humbling, not exalting? What is the "When I do stare, see how the subject quakes"—if it is not terrible derision? Let us remember that when he recovers his senses he never once adverts to his rank or his kingdom. Cordelia is all his care. The fires of suffering have purged his soul. When Cordelia and the Physician tell him of "his own kingdom," and, unaware of the change that has passed, are careful to address him as "Your highness," he turns aside and prays them not to abuse him. Mr. Forrest did nothing with this latter scene. We must not forget to add that he had tacked the death of Lear very inconsiderately on Tate's wretched adaptation;<sup>1</sup>—he played it without the slightest effect. If the audience, indeed, were moved at all, they were moved the wrong way. So little were they inclined to sympathise with Mr. Forrest, that on his saying in a somewhat short and sharp tone to Kent, from over the dead body of Cordelia, "Who are you?"—a general titter ran through the house. The curtain fell amid very moderate applause.

We cannot come to any other conclusion, after these performances of Lear and Othello, than that Mr. Forrest will find it impossible to maintain his position here as a first-rate tragedian. He would be a most useful actor if his ambition were not so great. With some study and education he would be found immeasurably superior, for instance, to Mr. Vandenhoff.<sup>2</sup> He expresses a certain kind of natural emotion with occasional force and fervour which are rare to

<sup>1</sup> In which Lear and Cordelia are left alive—an alteration defended by Dr. Johnson in his edition of Shakespeare.

<sup>2</sup> John Vandenhoff (1790-1861) was a moderately good actor. He was for many years "leading man" at Liverpool.

our stage. We shall take an early opportunity of doing justice to his style in this respect. He will not allow us to think of it while he mars the masterpieces of Shakespeare.

### FORREST AS MACBETH.

*February 12, 1837.*

MR. FORREST has returned to this theatre from the provinces, and played, during the past week, Othello, Virginius, and Macbeth.<sup>1</sup> Of his performance of the latter character we will say a few words. It is a decisive specimen of the style we have so often condemned.

It has been most truly remarked of the genius of Shakespeare, that it is even more shown in the subtlety and nice discrimination than in the force and variety of his characters. That is, whether he sought to delineate imbecility and effeminacy in Henry the Sixth and Richard the Second; or to paint ambition and cruelty in Richard the Third and Macbeth—he preserved the distinction between such characters as these, which in their general features and obvious appearance most nearly resemble each other, even more strongly than between such as are, in those very respects, most widely opposite. Now we take it to be a certain test of the powers of an actor to observe whether or not he is able to preserve such distinctions upon the stage. Shakespeare's Macbeth is not more widely removed from his Richard the Third than it is from his Richard the Second. Mr. Forrest's Macbeth, on the other hand, is no more than Richard the Third disguised in tartan. Will, and passion, are the sole characteristics of the performance. Not a single ray of the genius of Shake-

<sup>1</sup> Drury Lane, February 9, 1837.

spere's wonderful Macbeth flickered upon Mr. Forrest from the commencement to the close. It will be easy, by the selection of one or two passages, to illustrate this.

In the first scene, where the fate-struck Thane, "standing amazedly" at the news Macduff has brought, contrasts it with the prediction of the weird sisters—"Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor: The greatest is behind"—and again, striving to persuade himself that the supernatural soliciting cannot be ill, yet feels that it cannot be good—"If ill, Why hath it given me earnest of success, Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor. If good, why do I yield," etc.—we have Macbeth before us, weak but not yet desperate, perplexed in thought, full of amazement not unmixed with fear, and standing in horrid doubt between the actual and the imaginative world. But Mr. Forrest cut all these distinctions short. The dreamy grandeur of "The greatest is behind"—he gave in a tone of bold and decided exultation; and after words, which merely express one element of that confused and frightful doubt, in the midst of which Macbeth's virtue and loyalty are reeling and staggering from him—"I am Thane of Cawdor,"—he shouted forth, accompanying them with a triumphant blow upon his breast from his truncheon; and the conclusion of the speech he gave with all those violent contortions of physical effect which he is so great a master of, and which were meant to convey to the galleries the absolute and painful truth of his assertion, that at that very moment his seated heart was knocking at his ribs against the use of nature.

This is what we hold to be the truly vulgar style of acting;—all nice traits and distinctions are lost in it; the absolute truth and identity of a character is never thought of; everything is sacrificed to a seeking after such coarse effects as may happen to lie on the mere surface of words wrenched



from the general text; and what the result may be as a whole, whether to leave the impression of a Macbeth or a Macheath, is a matter of no earthly importance. Mr. Forrest is more singularly devoid of anything like an imaginative power than any actor we ever beheld. He can never master at a time more than one image, or one passion. In the conferring, the abstracting, or the modifying power,—in all that belongs to the imagination,—he is wholly deficient. And what a deficiency is this! For in such characters as those of Shakespeare, images or passions cut out separately are nothing; it is only when connected with or opposed to each other that they become indeed affecting and true. It is, moreover, the natural result of those vulgar resources by which the actor seeks to supply so notable a defect as this, that, in really simple passages of expression or passion, he destroys the simplicity by an affectation of over-meaning. Where Macbeth, whirled out of his last virtuous longing by the dazzling prospect of his wife's grand and guilty scheme, gives vent to that irrepressible tribute to her boldness—"bring forth men children only!" etc.—Mr. Forrest, by his elaboration of the words, gave them the air of a positive instruction, just as if he were telling her ladyship to go to bed, or to prepare his posset.

We have no desire, nor is it necessary, to go through the irksome task of reviewing the whole of this very bad and very ignorant performance, but we may instance one or two passages more. All the grand preparations for the murder scene were miserably slurred over; and the address to the visionary dagger was given with such a series of gaspings, grimacings, and convulsions, as showed but too well how little the actor could comprehend that in the fearful tumult and disorder of the mind of Macbeth lies the sole sublimity of the poet's conception. The conclusion of that soliloquy



was in keeping with the whole of the misconception. As he steals into the chamber of Duncan a peal of thunder is heard—he starts back, gasps at the audience, slowly recovers, and disappears in the midst of the applauses of galleries and orchestra. On his reappearance we have a “point” made, equally novel and unfortunate. As Lady Macbeth waits his entrance in breathless suspense, his back appears at the door of Duncan’s chamber, and with outstretched hands holding the bloody daggers, his face still gazing at the door, Mr. Forrest moves over the stage with an elaborately noiseless step, until a touch from the hand of Miss Huddart<sup>1</sup> at the opposite side gives him the opportunity, after a violent start, of throwing his body into one tremendous convulsion—which he does forthwith, to the great delight of the injudicious. What wretched trifling is this with the grandeur of such a scene! Is the absurd folly of it worth exposure? Reflect for an instant. It is the poet’s intention to exhibit Macbeth here, as throughout his entire conception, desperate only in act, and after act relapsing into perplexity and disorder of thought. Macbeth, we again say, is not a Richard, cruel from absolute nature, and tense and concentrated in every bloody purpose. In Macbeth, every possible motive, even “fate and metaphysical aid,” is accumulated upon him to overcome the repugnance of his will to crime, and, the crime committed, he instantly recoils, becomes purely lost in himself, is again troubled with thick-coming fancies, and tortured by those glimpses of a better nature which show so ghastly amid the ruins of his virtue. Immediately before his entrance on the occasion we allude to we hear his voice

<sup>1</sup> Mary Amelia Huddart, afterwards Mrs. Warner (1804-54), who so nobly supported Phelps in his artistic labours at Sadler’s Wells. She was by many judges considered the legitimate successor of Mrs. Siddons.

shouting from within, "Who's there? What ho!" and we know that at that very instant he has committed the murder and lost his self-possession. How monstrous is it, then, to see him afterwards come stealing elaborately over the stage, with all his wits about him, and only vulgarly alive to detection! It might seem obvious to a child who was able to read the scene, that, from the hurried and awful words with which Macbeth enters—"I have done the deed—did'st thou not hear a noise!"—through the whole of the terrible passages that follow, it was the poet's intention to express the weak and imaginative murderer, in the agony of his crime recoiling upon him, only dizzy with guilt, and for the instant thoughtless of exposure. It is not till Lady Macbeth has had the opportunity of working a violent compulsion on his remorse that he is able to tighten and brace up his nerves again, and encounter the scene of the discovery of the hapless Duncan.

The glorious fifth act suffered in proportion to its beauty. As Mr. Forrest's Macbeth had been ungilded by any of those bright rays of morning which throw into such exquisite relief the dark crimes committed in this tragedy, so not one sad or touching beam of evening shed its melancholy beauty on its fall. His mournful retrospection of life passed without effect; and he stalked about the stage rattling his truncheon at the "To-morrow—and to-morrow—and to-morrow," as if Macbeth should not at this speech stand rooted to the spot, as a man who had arrived at the crisis of a stormy life at last, and, from the edge of the precipice on which his foot has stumbled, now gazes down on the abyss of fate! The terrible imprecation against the officer who tells of the moving of the wood of Birnam—"If thou speak'st false," etc.—only renders the now sure despair of Macbeth more touching—"If thy speech be sooth, I care not if thou dost

for me as much!" Here Mr. Forrest, however, exhibited a most lusty despair, for at the close of these words he lifted the unfortunate officer bodily from the ground and fairly flung him off the stage!<sup>1</sup> Through a succession of such vulgar tricks, he then, to our most infinite relief, arrived at last at the close. He was afterwards called before the curtain, *and so was Mr. Warde.*<sup>2</sup>

There are singularly fine things in Miss Huddart's *Lady Macbeth*. We will instance one. After seizing the daggers from Macbeth, she moved hurriedly towards the chamber of Duncan, but as she approached the entrance, as if suddenly controlled by some vision of the awful scene that awaited her there, she paused for an instant, and then passed slowly in. This was a stroke of genius.

### FORREST AS RICHARD THE THIRD.

*March 5, 1837.*

MR. FORREST'S Richard the Third<sup>3</sup> forms no exception to those murderous attacks upon Shakespeare which this gentleman has so ruthlessly made since his arrival amongst us. Since the time of that elder Forrest, who had such a hand in the murder of the princes in the Tower, we may

<sup>1</sup> This sounds like an exaggeration; but it is probably accurate enough. Forrest was notorious for the use, or abuse, of his gigantic strength in such situations. In *Damon and Pythias*, a messenger in somewhat similar circumstances to those of the officer in *Macbeth* was said always to play the part at the risk of his neck; and Mr. Herman Vezin has given an amusing account of the treatment meted out to the unfortunate actor.

<sup>2</sup> James Warde (1790-1840) was a tragedian of the second rank—a "respectable" actor.

<sup>3</sup> Drury Lane, February 27, 1837.

not inappropriately take this last execution of Richard at Drury Lane to be

“The most arch deed of piteous massacre  
That ever yet this land was guilty of.”<sup>1</sup>

We have tried very hard, since witnessing the performance, to discover the principle or intention of it; but to no effect. We remember some expressions, however, in an old comedy of Greene's, which may possibly suggest something to the purpose. “How,” says Bubble, on finding himself dressed out very flauntingly indeed,—“how apparel makes a man respected! The very children in the street do adore me!”<sup>2</sup> In almost every scene Mr. Forrest blazed forth a new and most oppressively gilded dress, for which he received precisely the kind of adoration that the simple Bubble adverts to. Richard the Third may have been a great dandy, we dare say; but it is giving too literal a meaning to the expressions of his wit and humour, to seek to drive the audience into a belief of his actually entertaining a score or two of tailors to study fashions to adorn his body. Yet, after all, this is to be forgiven where no other resources present themselves; provided only it “shakes the pit and makes the boxes stare.”<sup>3</sup> When we cannot have strokes of passion or niceties of character, we may be dazzled by layers of tinsel gilt.

Colley Cibber's “acting version” of Shakespeare's

<sup>1</sup> Francis Courtney Wemyss, the American manager, in his *Biography* (1848), says, “Forrest played Richard the Third—the worst representative of that character I ever witnessed; nor do I think he has ever improved upon his first false conception of the character.”

<sup>2</sup> This is from *Greenes Tu quoque, Or, the Cillie Gallant*, by Io. Cooke, Gent. Printed 1614. See Dodsley's *Old English Plays* (1875), vol. xi.

<sup>3</sup> “What shook the stage and made the people stare?”—POPE.

tragedy of *Richard the Third* is one of the severest reproaches that could possibly be passed upon the profession of the stage, considered as an intellectual art. Great actors, however, have been able, by the variety and brilliancy of their resources, in some sort to neutralise the reproach. The performance of the late Mr. Kean was an eminent instance of this. The thorough decision and self-possession which he threw into it was not to be surpassed. The apparent intellectual vigour surmounted the moral depravity, and blunted the edge even of Cibber's vulgar scenes. When will the deep and eloquent thoughtfulness, the silent and piercing looks, the matchless grace and persuasiveness of manner and tone, which distinguished that fine actor in this part, be forgotten by those who witnessed them? These characteristics, far beyond the resistless fire and rapidity of his style in the latter scenes, stamped Mr. Kean's reputation in *Richard the Third*. But these, or even a remote glimpse of them, are not accessible to an imitator.

We say this because it was clear to us that Mr. Forrest was only thinking, all the while he played in the tragedy, of Mr. Kean<sup>1</sup> and Mr. James Wallack,<sup>2</sup> and of his own tremendous power of lungs. Now it was curious to see how ineffective those resources were, and chiefly the last. The noise of artillery could scarcely be more ear-stunning than his voice; but it was voice and nothing else. A more striking example could scarcely be given of the incapacity of an actor. Such, on the other hand, was Mr. Kean's exquisite art, that a manifest defect of voice in these scenes was converted, in his case, into the means of giving

<sup>1</sup> See footnote, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> James William Wallack (1791-1864) was an actor of very varied power, and of great ability. He played Richmond to Kean's Richard.



stronger and more piercing expression to them. The surgy sound that tore upwards from his throat, when he animated his soldiers to the charge, or vented his own despair, brought us at once upon the scene.<sup>1</sup> We felt ourselves under the open air of Bosworth Field.

It should be said that Mr. Forrest in some sort reconciles us to the worst of his imitations when he ventures on an "original" point. When the confident and sarcastic Richard, as his eye falls on the blood-stained blade which he has just withdrawn from Henry's death-wound, sports with his crime and makes it the toy of his fancy—

"See how my sword weeps for the poor king's death!  
O, may such purple tears be always shed  
From those that wish the downfall of our house"<sup>2</sup>—

Mr. Forrest gave a vulgar and absurd expression to the lines by shaking his sword violently while he uttered them, as if it were necessary so to assure the audience that blood continued to "drip, drip, drip" (as Mr. Coleridge says in one of his tragedies) from off the blade.

Shakespeare in this passage adverted to the blood upon Glo'ster's sword, simply that he might resort to the play of fancy that rose out of it;—the actor insisted on the blood alone, and threw a heap of rubbish over the fancy. It is always thus with the poet, and his merciless translator into prose. A matter of fact is insisted on, in the one case, for the beauty and grandeur that accompanies it; in the other, it is insisted upon because it is a matter of fact, while the beauty or grandeur is thrust out of sight. We could illustrate this by a dozen other passages from this very performance.

<sup>1</sup> Kean's voice generally began to show the effects of fatigue by the time this part of the play was reached.

<sup>2</sup> *Henry VI.*, Part III. v. 6; introduced by Cibber into *Richard III.*



Mr. Forrest's ideas of heroism, and of the passion of courage or despair, appear to have been gathered among the wilds of his native country. This we have had occasion to remark before. Through the fourth and fifth acts of the tragedy he carried these notions to their extreme; and truly, if hideous looks and furious gestures, ear-splitting shouts and stage-devouring strides, could be supposed to embody a princely dignity, a courageous gallantry, or a terrible despair, why then Mr. Forrest was Richard indeed. One of the most wretched and melodramatic tricks of the profession closed the performance. While Richard fought with Richmond he had provided himself with long and heavy strips of black hair, which were fixed in such a way that they came tumbling over his forehead, eyes, and face, with every barbarous turn and gesture. The princely Plantagenet—he

“ Who was born so high  
His airy buildeth in the cedar's top,  
And dallies with the wind and scorns the sun ”—

was thus accomplished by Mr. Forrest in all the points of a savage newly caught from out of the American backwoods.

### CHARLES KEAN AS HAMLET.

*January 14, 1838.*

MR. CHARLES KEAN<sup>1</sup> having selected this theatre [Drury Lane, January 8] for his appearance in London, performed Hamlet on Monday night. The audience was

<sup>1</sup> Charles John Kean (1811-1868) was the son of Edmund Kean. He made his first appearance on the stage, as Young Norval, at Drury Lane, October 1, 1827, with very slight success. Again he appeared at Drury Lane in 1828, and again met with little encouragement. He made his first London success at the Haymarket in the autumn of 1829, as Sir Edward Mortimer in *The Iron Chest*. In 1833 he appeared at

a crowded one, and gave him a reception on his entrance such as few actors in their palmiest days of triumph have received. The pit rose at him, and a "sea of handkerchiefs" waved welcome from the boxes. The object of such hearty kindness could not have been other than deeply affected by it, and traces of emotion were still visible when the first lines of Hamlet were spoken, such as Hamlet himself needed not to have shown. Mr. Kean did not rally till a flourish of trumpets had relieved the stage of Mr. Baker and his attendants, when he threw out the first lines of the soliloquy, "O that this too too solid flesh would melt," with a passionate fervour that was admirable. The close of the soliloquy failed to realise the hope this inspired in us, and the manner of saying, "Frailty, thy name is woman," as if for a lesson to all the women in the house, did not supply by its solemnity the familiar bitterness of Hamlet.

But let us remark at once, before speaking further in detail, that the impression left upon us by this performance of Mr. Charles Kean—if not that it was an embodiment of Hamlet—most certainly was that the London stage has received a rich acquisition in the person of a vigorous, self-possessed, and most graceful actor, whose youth stretches

Covent Garden, and played Iago to his father's Othello on the night of Edmund Kean's last performance (March 25, 1833), when he broke down at the close of Othello's "Farewell." This was the only time the father and son appeared together in London. Soon after, Charles Kean left London, vowing that he would never return until he could command his own terms,—£50 a night. He worked hard, and was very successful in the provinces; and Bunn now engaged him at £50 a night, no doubt with the view of opposing a strong attraction to Macready's Shakespearian productions at Covent Garden. Kean played Hamlet for twelve successive nights to a receipt, says Bunn, of £3858 12s. 6d.

out a long line of promise which we shall hope to see thoroughly redeemed. Mr. Kean will not object to such a description as this when he remembers how much he has already achieved by study, by courage, and the gallantest perseverance. It is in the nature of the noble art he has even now obtained so high a place in, to give its professors greater and greater materials of success as their age matures, their sphere of observation enlarges, and humanity in all its shapes comes more distinctly within their view.

What we felt to be the pervading mistake of this performance of Hamlet we will at once describe. It was too uniformly slow and elaborate; the same pitch-key of sad sound prevailed too much throughout; when any change or relief was introduced it was strained at too hard; and the general effect conveyed was something extremely unlike the feeble and variable purpose, the quick sensibility, the thoughtful melancholy, the indolent philosophy of the real Hamlet. We know the temptations which every actor has in such a character as this to exaggerate its subtle and delicate shading for the purposes of the stage; but Mr. Kean, as it appeared to us, attempted these exaggerations in the wrong places. The reliefs which Shakespeare has suggested to the deep but wayward melancholy of Hamlet are obvious enough. His passion for thinking includes every form of thought—the fantastic, the satirical, the “wild and whirling,” even the hectic shapes of gaiety. He is very fond of the art of acting, and practises it himself quite as much for the love he bears to it as in the hope of removing further from him the sad realities. He is a prince, who shakes hands with the humble players as with his old friends and school-fellows—a lover, who finds himself obliged to counterfeit hate in the hope of alienating both himself and his mistress from a passion that had suddenly to both become hopeless

—an avenger, who is called upon to act and flies to every sort of excuse to avoid action—a friend, in whose heart friendship survives every other emotion and becomes the last comfort of the hour of death.

Mr. Kean is always graceful, but never sufficiently familiar in speech or bearing: and he underacts the friendship and overacts the love. When he converses with Horatio on his first entrance from Wittenberg, he stands in the centre of the stage and Horatio in one corner of it—when he instructs the player (which he does extremely well) he holds him at a still greater distance, though we fancy Hamlet at that instant more than ever familiar with his old player friend—when Rosencrantz and Guildenstern visit him, he makes a violent and abrupt “set” at them, whereas it is one of the very nicest points of Hamlet to keep up, throughout that scene, the quiet demeanour of conscious detection and cool observance, yet of friendly familiarity. The second scene with these old schoolfellows was better played, and the look at Rosencrantz on the words, “Sir, I lack advancement,” was an admirable thing.

It is not difficult to trace to their source the majority of Mr. Kean’s mistakes in this arduous performance. It will be found, we think, that his chief power with an audience lies in effect of emotion and of sudden gusts of passion, and his own consciousness of this is betrayed in a habit of emphasising his level passages too much, of throwing them into startling contrast by long pauses, and of laying forceful and pathetic stress on lines that need no such aid. Thus parts of his scene with the Ghost were full of excellent emotion, though we highly dislike his elaborate removal of his cap on the mention of the word “father”—some passages of the soliloquy, “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I,” were also given very finely—and nothing could be better in

conception or execution than the burst upon the words, "What a piece of work is man;"—and yet in all these cases the emotion was prolonged so far beyond the natural point that it assumed at last the appearance of a trick. The speech after the disappearance of the Ghost, for instance—the words he then addresses to his friends, which in their tearful slowness could never have passed for "wild and whirling"—the formal and melancholy precision with which he specially addresses Horatio—the entire misapprehension of the charming scene at Ophelia's grave, where he seems inclined to shed tears for the clay of "Imperial Cæsar," and addresses his remonstrance to Laertes in sad and solemn slowness—his most laborious and elaborate trifling with Osrick—are all illustrations of our objection.

In the scene of Hamlet's reappearance at the palace after meeting his dead father, Mr. Kean entered without any disorder of dress, and the "new reading" has been applauded.<sup>1</sup> It is a very silly reading notwithstanding. We do not care if the disorder is intimated by an ungartered stocking, the usual mode, or any other and better; but intimated, or rather distinctly expressed, it most surely should be. It is not only essential to the general conduct of the scene, but specially alluded to by almost every one on the stage. Ophelia describes him to her father—

"With his doublet all unbrac'd,  
No hat upon his head; his stockings foul'd,  
Ungarter'd, and down-gyved to his ancle"—

and afterwards deplores that the "glass of fashion and the mould of form" should be so "quite down"; while the

<sup>1</sup> Bunn remarks on this point:—"It is literally a relief to see a Hamlet not resorting to the vulgarism of having a stocking dangling at his heel, to prove the distemper of his mind."



King himself tells his old schoolfellows that neither "the exterior nor the inward man Resembles that it was." Another "new reading," really admirable, has been objected to—where in the fine soliloquy that closes the second act he changes his tone upon the epithet "kindless"—

"Bloody, bawdy villain!

Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!"

and by some tears of anguish at the word, expresses at once both Hamlet's pure and refined nature, and the weakness and sensibility of his temper.<sup>1</sup> But this was not a new reading, though admirably rendered by Mr. Kean. Mr. Macready first gave it fame on the modern stage, and Garrick had startled an audience with it in older times. How often, in applauding living actors, we applaud also the posthumous merits of the dead! but it is pleasant, reflecting upon this, to fancy we may sometimes be applauding even the suggestions of Shakespeare himself to the actors of his own time. The celebrated old Prompter Downes indeed distinctly says, with reference to this very part, that "Mr. Betterton took every particle of his Hamlet from Sir William Davenant, who had seen Mr. Taylor, who was taught by Mr. Shakespeare himself." However this may have been, the performance was certainly the masterpiece of that greatest of actors—Betterton.<sup>2</sup>

We have said that Mr. Kean overacted Hamlet's love. He wept and sank with his face upon Ophelia's arm when he told her that "he did love her once," and his voice prolonged itself into tremulous softness when he rushed back to her to give her "a plague for her dowry." We are aware

<sup>1</sup> See p. 111, for Lewes's criticism of this point.

<sup>2</sup> It would be more accurate to say that Hamlet was *one* of Betterton's masterpieces.



that the elder Mr. Kean infused the same affectionate tenderness into his worst upbraidings, and was much and most undeservedly praised for it. The scene, as Shakespeare designed it, needs no such refining to give it sense and the deepest sorrow. Taken as an artifice of love to wean Ophelia from him, and to stop the continuance of that affectionate intercourse which a supernatural visitation had for ever forbidden in this world, the apparent brutality of the gentle and princely Hamlet throughout the interview is in truth the secret of its most afflicting pathos. The first thing said by the King after leaving the concealment from which he has heard and seen the interview is decisive as to his impression—

“ Love ! his affections do not that way tend !  
Nor what he spake, though it lack'd form a little,  
Was not like madness”—

which the King could not have said, if he had seen Mr. Charles Kean instead of Hamlet. The actor may be allowed indeed to counterfeit this affected hate and brutality to Ophelia awkwardly, and the scene will be all the better for it ; but counterfeit it he must, or the scene is nothing.

It is somewhat curious that the first actor who introduced the tender style of playing this scene was Wilks, the rival of Betterton.<sup>1</sup> “ Wilks,” says Davies, “ preserved here the feelings of a lover and the delicacy of a gentleman.” But then we know, from a very interesting passage in Colley Cibber's *Apology*, that Betterton's Hamlet was the reverse of Wilks's, *and we recollect the anecdote told by*

<sup>1</sup> Wilks and Betterton were really actors of different periods, though their stage careers overlapped. It is also very questionable whether Wilks was the introducer of the tender style of playing this scene. Davies does not say so.

*Downes*.<sup>1</sup> "When an actor," says Cibber, "becomes [*i.e.*, appears becoming in] and naturally looks the character he stands in, I have often observed it to have had as fortunate an effect, and as much recommended him to the approbation of the common auditors, as the most correct or judicious utterance of the sentiments. This was strongly visible in the favourable reception Wilks met with in Hamlet, where I own the half of what he spoke was as painful to my ear, as every line that came from Betterton was charming; and yet it is not impossible, could they have come to a poll, but Wilks might have had a majority of admirers. However, such a division would have been no proof that the pre-eminence had not still remained in Betterton."

We may remark in conclusion that this is not inapplicable to Mr. Kean's performance, which with all its faults is very interesting. He looks the youthfulness of the character, and is as graceful as the Prince of Denmark himself might have been. For ourselves, however, we look to see the more effective qualities and characteristics of his acting better brought forward in other parts, of greater violence and suddenness, and of more decisive passion. With cordial and unaffected sincerity we wish him all the success (and it will not be slight) which his talents and unconquerable energy very richly deserve.

#### MACREADY'S PRODUCTION OF "KING LEAR."

*February 4, 1838.*

WHAT we ventured to anticipate when Mr. Macready

<sup>1</sup> We can only suppose that this is a reference to the statement that Betterton's Hamlet was founded on traditions of Shakespeare's teaching.

assumed the management of Covent Garden Theatre,<sup>1</sup> has been every way realised. But the last of his well-directed efforts to vindicate the higher objects and uses of the drama, has proved the most brilliant and the most successful. He has restored to the stage Shakespeare's true *Lear*, banished from it, by impudent ignorance, for upwards of a hundred and fifty years.

A person of the name of Boteler has the infamous repute of having recommended to a notorious poet laureate, Mr. Nahum Tate, the "new modelling" of *Lear*. "I found the whole," quoth Mr. Tate, addressing the aforesaid Boteler in his dedication, "to answer your account of it; a heap of jewels unstrung and unpolished, yet so dazzling in their disorder, that I soon perceived I had seized a treasure." And accordingly to work set Nahum, very busily indeed; strung the jewels and polished them with a vengeance; omitted the grandest things, the Fool among them, polished all that remained into commonplace; interlarded love-scenes; sent Cordelia into a comfortable cave with her lover, to dry her clothes and get warm, while her distracted and houseless old father was still left wandering without, amid all the pelting of the pitiless storm; and finally rewarded the poor old man in his turn, and repaid him for all his suffering, by giving him back again his gilt robes and tinsel sceptre!

Betterton was the last great actor who played *Lear* before the commission of this outrage. His performances of it between the years 1663 and 1671, are recorded to have been the greatest efforts of his genius.<sup>2</sup> Ten years after

<sup>1</sup> Macready became lessee of Covent Garden, September 30, 1837. *King Lear* was produced January 25, 1838, and was acted ten times that season.

<sup>2</sup> These statements regarding Betterton and *King Lear* are somewhat imaginative—at least they are not the certainties which they are made to appear.

the latter date Mr. Tate published his disgusting version, and this was adopted successively by Boheme, Quin, Booth, Barry, Garrick, Henderson, Kemble, Kean. Mr. Macready has now, to his lasting honour, restored the text of Shakespeare, and we shall be glad to hear of the actor foolhardy enough to attempt another restoration of the text of Tate! Mr. Macready's success has banished that disgrace from the stage for ever.

The Fool in the tragedy of *Lear* is one of the most wonderful creations of Shakespeare's genius. The picture of his quick and pregnant sarcasm, or his loving devotion, of his acute sensibility, of his despairing mirth, of his heart-broken silence—contrasted with the rigid sublimity of Lear's suffering, with the huge desolation of Lear's sorrow, with the vast and outspread image of Lear's madness—is the noblest thought that ever entered into the mind and heart of man. Nor is it a noble thought alone. Three crowded audiences in Covent Garden Theatre have now proved by something better than even the deepest attention that it is for action—for representation: that it is necessary to an audience as tears are to an overcharged heart; and necessary to Lear himself as the recollection of his kingdom, or as the worn and faded garments of his power. We predicted some years since that this would be felt, and we have the better right to repeat it now. We take leave again to say that Shakespeare would have as soon consented to the banishment of Lear from the tragedy, as to the banishment of his Fool. We may fancy him, while planning his immortal work, feeling suddenly, with an instinct of divinest genius, that its gigantic sorrows could never be presented on the stage without a suffering too frightful, a sublimity too remote, a grandeur too terrible—unless relieved by quiet pathos, and in some way brought

home to the apprehensions of the audience by homely and familiar illustration. At such a moment that Fool rose to his mind, and not till then could he have contemplated his marvellous work in the greatness and beauty of its final completion.

The Fool in *Lear* is the solitary instance of such a character, in all the writings of Shakespeare, being identified with the pathos and passion of the scene. He is interwoven with Lear—he is the link that still associates him with Cordelia's love, and the presence of the regal state he has surrendered. The rage of the wolf Goneril is first stirred by a report that her favourite gentleman had been struck by her father "for chiding of his fool"—and the first impatient questions we hear from the dethroned old man are "Where's my knave—my fool? Go you and call my fool hither."—"Where's my fool? ho! I think the world's asleep."—"But where's my fool? I have not seen him this two days."—"Go you and call hither my fool." All which prepare us for that affecting answer stammered forth at last by the Knight in attendance—"Since my young Lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away." Mr. Macready's manner of turning off at this with an expression of half impatience, half ill-repressed emotion—"No more of that—*I have noted it well*"—was inexpressibly touching. We saw him, in the secret corner of his heart, still clinging to the memory of her who used to be his best object, the argument of his praise, balm of his age, "most best, most dearest." And in the same noble and affecting spirit was his manner of fondling the Fool when he sees him first, and asks him with earnest care—"How now, my pretty knave? *How dost thou?*" Can there be a doubt, after this, that his love for the Fool is associated with Cordelia, who had been kind to the poor



boy, and for the loss of whom he pines away? And are we not even then prepared for the sublime pathos of the close, when Lear, bending over the dead body of all he had left to love upon the earth, connects with her the memory of that other gentle, faithful, and loving being who had passed from his side—unites, in that moment of final agony, the two hearts that had been broken in his service—and exclaims—“And my poor fool is hanged!”

Mr. Macready's Lear, remarkable before for a masterly completeness of conception, is heightened by this introduction of the Fool to a surprising degree. It accords exactly with the view he seeks to present of Lear's character.<sup>1</sup> The passages we have named, for instance, had even received illustration in the first scene, where something beyond the turbulent greatness or royal impatience of Lear had been presented—something to redeem him from his treatment of Cordelia. The bewildered pause giving his “father's heart” away—the hurry yet hesitation of his manner as he orders France to be called—“Who stirs? Call Burgundy”—had told us at once how much consideration he needed, how much pity, of how little of himself he was indeed the master, how crushing and irrepressible was the strength of his sharp impatience. We saw no material change in his style of playing the first great scene with Goneril, which fills the stage with true and appalling touches of nature. In that scene he ascends indeed with the heights of Lear's passion; through all its changes of agony, of anger, of impatience, of turbulent assertion, of despair, and mighty grief; till on his knees, with arms upraised and head thrown back, the tremendous curse bursts from him amid

<sup>1</sup> Yet Macready was so nervous about the restoration of the Fool that he almost decided to cut him out after all. The part was acted by a lady, Miss Priscilla Horton. See p. 68.



heaving and reluctant throes of suffering and anguish. The great scene of the second act had also its old passages of power and beauty—his self-persuading utterance of “*hysterica passio*”—his anxious and fearful tenderness to Regan—the elevated grandeur of his appeal to the Heavens—his terribly suppressed efforts, his pauses, his reluctant pangs of passion, in the speech “I will not trouble thee, my child”—and surpassing the whole, as we think, in deep simplicity as well as agony of pathos, that noble conception of shame as he *hides his face* on the arm of Goneril and says—

“ I’ll go with thee —  
Thy fifty yet doth double five and twenty,  
And thou art twice her love ! ”

The Fool’s presence then enabled him to give an effect, unattempted before, to those little words which close the scene, when, in the effort of bewildering passion with which he strives to burst through the phalanx of amazed horrors that have closed him round, he feels that his intellect is shaking, and suddenly exclaims, “O, Fool! I shall go mad!” This is better than hitting the forehead and ranting out a self-reproach.

But the presence of the Fool in the storm-scene! The reader must witness this to judge its power, and observe the deep impression with which it affects the audience. Every resource that the art of the painter and the mechanist can afford is called in aid in this scene—every illustration is thrown on it of which the great actor of Lear is capable—but these are nothing to that simple presence of the Fool! He has changed his character there. So long as hope existed he had sought by his hectic merriment and sarcasm to win Lear back to love and reason—but that half of his work is now over, and all that remains for him is to soothe

and lessen the certainty of the worst. Kent asks who is with Lear in the storm, and is answered—

“None but the *Fool*, who labours to outjest  
His heart-struck injuries!”

When all his attempts have failed, either to soothe or outjest these injuries, he sings, in the shivering cold, about the necessity of “going to bed at noon.” He leaves the stage to die in his youth, and we hear of him no more till we hear the sublime touch of pathos over the dead body of the hanged Cordelia.

The finest passage of Mr. Macready’s scenes upon the heath is his remembrance of the “poor naked wretches,” wherein a new world seems indeed to have broken upon his mind. Other parts of these scenes wanted more of tumultuous extravagance, more of a preternatural cast of wildness. We should always be made to feel something beyond physical distress predominant here. The colloquy with Mad Tom, however, was touching in the last degree—and so were the two last scenes, the recognition of Cordelia and the death, which elicited from the audience the truest and best of all tributes to their beauty and pathos. Mr. Macready’s representation of the father at the end, broken down to his last despairing struggle, his heart swelling gradually upwards till it bursts in its closing sigh, completed the only perfect picture that we have had of Lear since the age of Betterton.<sup>1</sup>

#### MACREADY’S PRODUCTION OF “CORIOLANUS.”

*March 18, 1838.*

THE presentation of this play at Covent Garden Theatre on

<sup>1</sup> Perfect, that is, in regard to the text spoken. Garrick’s Lear (in Tate’s version) is said to have been one of his greatest achievements.

Monday night last may be esteemed the worthiest tribute to the genius and fame of Shakespeare that has been yet attempted on the English stage.<sup>1</sup> We have had nothing to compare with it, even in Mr. Macready's management. Magnificent as the revivals of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, and *Macbeth* have been, this of *Coriolanus* surpasses them all, in the opportunity it has afforded of presenting together upon the stage those striking characteristics, material no less than intellectual, which render a correct knowledge of great times past superior to every other sort of knowledge—not less an instructive picture of noble or heroic manners, than an exercise of reason, and a school of philosophy.

Rome has been presented on the theatrical scene before, but never this Rome; the rude city of the rude age of the Conqueror of Corioli. That is the first distinction which claims notice. The pictures which Kemble gave when he revived the play might be splendid, but they were utterly unreal—they clustered fine buildings together with equal disregard to the proprieties of place or time—the arch of Severus or Constantine, the Coliseum, the pillar of Trajan, all the grandeurs of imperial Rome, flaunted away within three hundred years of the first birth of the city—and even men of scholarship could find no bounds to the satisfaction they expressed. We can scarcely blame them. It was natural that they should prefer even that to the wilder absurdity of a picture of Grosvenor Square; and it must be confessed that the effect of solid long lines and triumphant-looking arches is so very Roman, generally speaking, and the idea

<sup>1</sup> Produced March 12. It was played only eight times that season. Macready's note in his Diary is: "The house was very indifferent; this was a blow. The reputation of this theatre for producing Shakesperian plays ought to have commanded more attention. I give up all hope!"

of Rome in the mind of posterity possesses so mighty and enduring a grandeur analogous to its stone and marble, that one of these Kemble misrepresentations might be almost hailed as even the just substitution of a general truth for a particular one—a moral and characteristic, if not a chronologic, truth. Nevertheless, truth itself, as a plain-spoken old Roman would have said, is the best of all truths; and upon this wiser principle Mr. Macready has proceeded; with what effect let the reader judge who goes to see the play. To what infinitely higher purpose is the moral grandeur of the place and of the men set off by a comparatively rude and barren city!

The first scene (all are painted with consummate skill and exactness) presents Rome from the skirt of Mount Aventine across a bend of the Tiber (which would bear, by-the-bye, an additional tinge of yellow)—taking in a view of the Capitoline hill, a glimpse of the porticoes of the forum, the temple of Vesta, the Cloaca Maxima, and the Palatine covered with its patrician dwellings. It is by an exquisite arrangement of art that, throughout the play, and in the rudest streets of the city, the Capitol is kept in view, and still presents, under varying aspects, the never-changed old Roman form (no matter that the materials were afterwards more splendid) of the three temples to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva. As a chord in music pervading the entire composition, this awakens and sustains in the spectator's mind grand associations of the later with those of the earlier Rome. The second scene is the interior of the house of Coriolanus, with its earthen vases, its bronze candelabra, its exquisite and almost pathetic simplicity. We have then pictures of the country between Rome and the Volscian territory—a distant view of the square camp entrenched—a field of battle covered with dead, and in the distance

Corioli. We are afterwards brought back to Rome, and placed in the interior of the forum, with, above, a glimpse of the still proud Capitol, and the little "thatched house of Romulus," while on our right stands the rostrum, and, terrifying us even yet from the very thought of litigation, the transfixed and ghastly image of the miserable Marsyas.<sup>1</sup> Then follows Coriolanus' triumphant entrance into Rome. The emotion of the vast crowds as the passage of the procession through the gate brings nearer and nearer its renowned hero—the forest of laurel boughs rustling through the air as each hand seeks to contribute something to the glory of the scene—the "stalks, bulks, windows" of the old and rude brick buildings of the city "smother'd up"—

" Leads fill'd, and ridges hors'd  
With variable complexions, all agreeing  
In earnestness to see him"—

and more touching still, the triumph, surpassing all this, of the mother and wife of the great soldier, as standing apart in the crowd (not coldly and absurdly, as in Kemble's time, arranged as figures in the procession),<sup>2</sup> they see him enter at last covered with the light purple and crowned with the oaken garland—these were the elements of a picture of life and excitement at once the noblest, and produced by the simplest and most striking means, we ever witnessed in a

<sup>1</sup> A statue of Marsyas stood at the entrance of the Forum, at the place used by merchants for meeting. It was chiefly intended *in terrorem litigatorum*. But this was surely one of the very anachronisms which Forster so sternly condemns.

<sup>2</sup> One of the grandest features in Kemble's production of *Coriolanus* was the marching of Mrs. Siddons, as if drunk with joy, in her son's triumphal procession. See Julian Young, *Memoirs of Charles Mayne Young*, chap. iii.



theatre. Every attempt at a stage "triumph" we happen to have seen before, compared with this, was as the gilt gingerbread of a Lord Mayor's show—the gorgeous tinsel of an ill-imitated grandeur. *This* was the grandeur itself, the rudeness and simplicity, the glory and the truth, of Life. The next scene was that of the assembled senate of Rome, and perhaps in simple and majestic beauty this scene surpassed every other. The senators, in number between one and two hundred, occupy three sides of the stage in triple rows of benches—all in their white robes; with every point of the dress, no less than of the grave and solemn bearing, that distinguished the Roman senator, duly and minutely rendered. The Consul occupies the chief seat in the middle of the back row—before him burns the sacred fire on an altar—and behind him, overhead, is the only other ornament of the place, the famous brazen wolf suckling Romulus and Remus. We defy any one, scholar or not, to look at this scene without emotion. It is not simply the image of power, but a reflection of the great heart, of Rome. It does not strike the senses, but appeals at once to the imagination. It breathes into the cold and statue-like associations of our youthful studies the passionate spirit of humanity and life. It is, as it were, the actual presence of the *genius* of Rome—not of her turbulent and wilful days, nor of those grim, ghastly, long-robed, heartless figures, that too often usurp her memory—but of that high-souled thought and temper, which, whenever the few great minds of the earth have since her fall made a stand against violence and fraud in the cause of liberty and reason, has still in the midst of them conjured up her image—the comfort of the battlefield of Hampden, the glory and consolation of the scaffolds of More and Vane and Sydney!

When Kemble played Coriolanus, his first appearance



after his banishment was under worthy James Thomson's statue of Mars in the house of Aufidius.<sup>1</sup> This was to the text of Shakespeare as a declamation to a feeling. When the curtain withdrew upon the first scene of the fourth act on Monday night, it disclosed a view of the city of Antium, by starlight—a truly grand and imaginative yet real scene—and in the centre of the stage Macready stood alone, the muffled, disguised, banished Coriolanus. This realised Shakespeare and Plutarch. Behind him were the moles running out into the sea, and at the back of the scene the horizon drawn beyond the sea in one long level line, interrupted only by a tall, solitary tower, the pharos, or watch-tower of Antium. The strict truth, and lofty moral effect, of this scene, are surpassingly beautiful. Its wide and barren aspect presents the simplicity and large-minded poverty of those old times, and the tower looks like Coriolanus himself in a less mortal shape, rising in lonely grandeur, but with still unextinguished light, above the melancholy of his exile and the level sternness of his contemporaries. The pathetic effect is suddenly and startlingly increased by the intrusion of music on the air, as the door of Aufidius' house, where the General feasts his nobles, opens on the left of the stage. The next scene shows Coriolanus (an image of Themistocles) seated by the wide hearth of Aufidius, around which are the household gods, and in its centre a burning fire. In all this Shakespeare's text is illustrated by the text of Shakespeare's own original, North's Plutarch. "It was

<sup>1</sup> This is Nahum Tate's arrangement. Aufidius is told by one of his servants that

"One of exalted port, his visage hid,  
Has plac'd himself beneath the statue of  
The mighty Mars, and there majestic stands  
In solemn silence."

even twi-light when he entered the city of Antium, and many people met him in the streets, but no man knew him. So he went directly to Tullus Aufidius' house, and when he came thither, *he got him vp straight to the chimney harth, and sate him downe*, and spake not a word to any man, his face all muffled ouer. They of the house spying him, wondred what he should be, and yet they durst not bid him rise. For il fauouredly muffled and disguised as he was, yet there appeared a certaine maiestie in his countenance, *and in his silence.*"

The last scene was a worthy climax to this series of triumphant effects—(among which, by the way, we should have mentioned the striking simplicity of the tent of Coriolanus). The entire Volscian army is shown under the walls of Rome, which are presented, with the proud Capitol still visible above them, in the distance, while we see in various moving towers and battering-rams vivid preparations for a siege. The number of brilliantly equipped soldiers on the stage in this scene is truly startling, and as their serried ranks open for the advance of the suppliants from Rome, we might fancy them thousands instead of hundreds. The appearance—the black apparition rather—of Coriolanus' mother and family with the other Roman matrons, stretching obliquely across the stage, in the midst of these brilliant warrior-files, one long, dreary, sable line of monotonous misery—was in the best and deepest taste. The last effect of all is a simple adherence to Shakespeare's own stage directions. The tragedy, as it were, does not end. Its action is only removed to Antium or Rome. "Exeunt, bearing the body of Coriolanus." As Aufidius mourns his treachery, the warriors around lift up the dead body of the conqueror on their shields, hang around it the splendidest trophies of war, and trailing their steel pikes

in sorrow, move with it slowly up the stage to the sound of mournful music. The curtain falls, and, thinking of the scene about to be enacted in Antium, we imagine the sorrow which will break some hearts in Rome !

Such are the pictorial effects alone in this magnificent revival, in themselves most beautiful always, and yet in every case kept strictly subservient to the conduct of the action and story of *Coriolanus*—not standing, as it were, apart from it, picture-like—but forming an actual portion of the lofty purposes and passions of the play. This profoundest effect of all is created throughout by the masterly arrangement and grouping of the persons engaged in each scene, and above all by the management of the formidable mob of the tragedy, the starving, discontented, savage, cowardly, fickle, tumultuous Roman people. The last alone would have sufficiently demonstrated the power of the artist-actor to grasp the entire conception of the poet's genius. The mob in *Coriolanus* were now for the first time shown upon the stage, on a level with the witches in *Macbeth*, as agents of the tragic catastrophe. "First mob" (as the list of *dramatis personæ* calls a plebeian speaker with his "Many") was personated with singular skill and energy by Mr. Meadows,<sup>1</sup> and never before, we dare assert, felt himself in such lively and multitudinous condition. He was something like a mob. His numerousness gave due effect to his will. He was not the one, or two, or half-dozen inefficient *sawnies* of former times, when John Kemble stalked and *thin-voiced* it among them, like the ghost of the Roman State; but a proper massy crowd of dangerous, violent fellows, fit to hustle Macready's flesh and blood. Those first and second mobs hitherto proper to the stage, and whose "voices" *Coriolanus* might

<sup>1</sup> See p. 107.

reasonably scorn to ask for, were fitter to have represented the nine tailors who make one married man in Mr. Beresford's laughable appendix to his *Miseries of Human Life*; where *their wife*,<sup>1</sup> hearing *him-them* coming upstairs, meets him on the stair-case, and says, "I knew it was you, my love; for I heard your *voices*." It was really formidable to see these Covent Garden mobs of Monday night. They fluctuated to and fro, as their violent assent or dissent impelled them, with a loud and overwhelming suddenness, and one-minded ponderosity, truly fearful to think of encountering; and the mere recollection of which gives more heroic breadth to the courage of Coriolanus. Their dresses, we may add, varying in every degree from the complete toga to the savage strip, were in the highest degree accurate and effective, as indeed the dresses were throughout. Old Menenius, who, when his zeal has betrayed him on one occasion into an appearance in armour, complains that he can hardly bear it, does not, as in Kemble's time, wear nothing else throughout the tragedy; nor does Coriolanus himself (wisely recollecting the Tarpeian rock) venture out in the fluttering scarlet which Kemble took such perverse delight in.

We have left ourselves less room than we could have wished, in closing our notice of this memorable revival, to speak of what has equal beauty, though less novelty, with these noble illustrations we have so long dwelt upon. Mr. Macready's Caius Marcius (we do not express this opinion for the first time) makes what we believe to be the nearest approach the stage has ever presented to the intention Shakespeare had in view. Coriolanus is not an ideal

<sup>1</sup> *The Miseries of Human Life ; or, the Groans of Samuel Sensitive and Timothy Testy. With a few Supplementary Sighs from Mrs. Testy. In twelve Dialogues*, 1806. [By the Rev. James Beresford.]

abstraction of the dignities and graces, but a soldier of the early republic of Rome, a man of rough manners, but of fiery and passionate sincerity. His friends are driven in the course of the tragedy to find many excuses for his unaccommodating temper and style of language in the rudeness of military habits, and it must be admitted that his style and temper are much the same, whether he addresses Patricians or People. He objects that the senate should "monster" his nothings, and he begs of the Consul Cominius, "for that he hath not wash'd his nose that bled," that he will not diet the little he has been able to accomplish "in praises sauc'd with lies." Plutarch (after whom Shakespeare modelled his tragedy) observes distinctly of him that for "lack of education" he was "so cholericke and impatient, that he would yeeld to no liuing creature: which made him churlish, *vncliuill*, and altogether vnfit for any man's conuersation." And again, the historian observes of him: "He was a man *too ful of passion and choller*, and too much giuen ouer to selfe-wil and opinion, and *one of a high mind* and great courage, that *lacked the grauitie and affabilitie* that is gotten with iudgment of learning and reason." This is the original sketch which Shakespeare has filled up with so much power and grandeur, with all the truth, the greatness, and the majesty of man. It is the silliest of mistakes to suppose that Coriolanus is an abstraction of Roman-nosed grandeur<sup>1</sup>—an embodiment of dignified contempt against the poor common people. Let not aristocrats suppose it. The scorn which he gives vent

<sup>1</sup> This attempt to elevate Macready's Coriolanus at the expense of John Kemble's drew from James Smith the happy epigram—

"What scenes of grandeur does this play disclose,  
Where all is Roman—save the Roman's nose!"



to, wrong and misplaced as it often is, has its unfailing source in what his own heart believes to be noble in thought and just in action. He has none of the characteristics of an oppressor or scorner of the poor. "He would not," as his friend tells us, "flatter Neptune for his trident, or Jove for his power of thunder." A thing has no charms for him because it is a thing of custom—for of "Custom" he holds "mountainous Error" to have been born. He opposes the people because he does not believe them to be trustworthy—he sides with the Patricians, only (as Plutarch says) because he hopes to persuade them to "show themselves no lesse forward and willing to fight for their country, then the common people were: and to let them know by their deeds and acts, *that they did not so much passe the people in power and riches, as they did exceed them in true nobility and valiantnesse*"—and not succeeding in this, he stigmatises them as "dastard nobles." Yet were all these glorious gifts made vain by an unhappy temper, and an education still more unhappy—his own strong natural passions and intense sensibility thwarted every way by the Spartan severity of Volumnia, his mother. The people had their faults no less, and as the passionate soldier refused to acknowledge the fairness of their simple claim, of exacting as the price of the Consulship that it should be asked for kindly—so, on the other hand, they would not see an anti-patrician simplicity and beauty in the claim of Coriolanus from *them*, that they should account him the more virtuous that he had not been common in his love and attachment to men.

*This* is the Coriolanus of Mr. Macready—not merely an ideal picture of one intense sentiment, but the reality of various and conflicting passion. He does not work up dignified contempt to an extraordinary pitch of intensity



with a view to have it on the minds of the audience as one great ideal abstraction—he gives nature full and various play; he calls in other passions to harmonise and redeem; he suffers as much as he sways, and, conflicting with opposite emotions in his soul, sinks at last beneath the struggle. After the preternatural excitement in the quarrel with Aufidius we feel that he is for the Earth no more. His scene with his mother and friends in the third act—his banishment in the forum—the claim of protection from Aufidius—the agonies of his yielding resolution in the last scene—all are exquisite illustrations of the view of the character we have attempted to describe. He was well supported by Miss Huddart in Volumnia (who was only a little too vehement sometimes) and by Mr. Anderson<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Warde in Aufidius and Cominius. Mr. Bartley's<sup>2</sup> Menenius is well known as an accurate and delightful picture of that honest and humorous patrician.

### MACREADY'S PRODUCTION OF "THE TEMPEST."

*October 21, 1838.*

THE *Tempest*, as it was produced on the 11th inst.,<sup>3</sup> is the triumph of Mr. Macready's management. It carries poetical and pictorial illustration as far as they will go. Shakespeare himself might have seen his own delightful play at last pass like an enchanted dream before him.

<sup>1</sup> James Anderson (1809-1895) was engaged by Macready for "Juvenile lead." See p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> George Bartley (1784-1858) was a comedian of wide experience. He had been stage-manager of Covent Garden under Charles Kemble, and retained the position with Macready.

<sup>3</sup> It was produced on October 13, not the 11th.

Dryden said well, in the prologue to his and to Davenant's alteration, or rather adulteration, of the *Tempest*,<sup>1</sup> that

“Shakespeare's magic could not copied be ;  
Within that circle none durst walk but he.”

Yet—having first intruded themselves there—the two modest Charles the Second poets ventured into a still more sacred and magical circle which Shakespeare is now thought to have had nearly as much to himself,—that of the affections, and made indeed a pretty business of it ! The alteration we speak of is known—it has been unhappily familiar to the playgoing public for upwards of a century and a half—and we need not dash the pleasant account we have now to give with any of its nauseous or disgusting details. Suffice it to say that they gave a sister to Miranda, and a lover who had never seen woman to the sister, on purpose to make them talk as Miranda does not, and show, we suppose, what sort of innocents on an island the Duchess of Cleveland and the Duke of Buckingham would have made.

All these, however, and all other sophistications of this glorious play (for they conspired to degrade even poor Caliban !) are now banished from the stage for ever. Mr. Macready has added to that large debt which all the friends of literature are now pressing round him to acknowledge, by restoring the Enchanted Island of Shakespeare to the innocence and golden purity of its first creation ; and by reproducing it with a grandeur of scenery and fairy flights, that would have won him the approbation of the masquers even of the Court of Charles the Second's father.

How strange and delightful, in these still puffing times, to see a “bill of the play” which absolutely seems almost too barren of announcement,—which does not make a

<sup>1</sup> *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island.*

single promise of a dress or decoration, much less of a scene, "stupendous" or otherwise,<sup>1</sup>—and then is followed up, to the eyes of the astonished spectator, by a full measure of performance "pressed down and running over"! Mr. Macready is now experiencing in this respect, how surely a moral daring ultimately succeeds, when founded on a manly truth. All our anticipations before this season opened have been far more than realised since. A new day has risen for the theatre of Shakespeare. The seeds that were sown a year ago have now ripened into a glorious harvest. The failing boxes which Mr. Macready had the courage last season to risk, are now themselves overflowing, like the scenes which attract them; and the more intelligent classes, who turned away in disgust from play bills *and lobbies*<sup>2</sup> of the former stamp, and were thought to have given up theatres altogether, are returning in crowds to the good old noble recreation of "a play," with the same respect which they entertained for the Siddonses and Kembles, endeared to them by a power of moving the domestic affections which they did not find in either.

Triumphant indeed was this *Tempest*, and potent over a crowded audience the noble wand of its enchantment. From the moment when Ariel first made her (we shall never say *his* again) appearance in the lovely and truly fairy guise of a shooting star, to the closing and no less lovely moment when the liberated sylphs were heard singing their far song of joy over the seas while Prospero was speaking his epilogue,—or rather, we should say (to

<sup>1</sup> This is, of course, a hit at Bunn, who "puffed" villainously. See p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> An allusion to the reform which Macready effected in excluding improper characters from the theatre.

"begin with the beginning"), from the instant the first scene opened with the ship, and then the storm came, and the hugest vessel that we ever beheld on the stage laboured in a genuine and most tremendous gulf of waters,—the whole audience, it is no hazard to affirm, were in a state of delighted wonder, and only woke from their marvels at the last "to cry to dream again."

The stage was truly a scene of fairy life from first to last. Ariel, in the happy shape of Miss P. Horton,<sup>1</sup> floated in air across the stage, singing or mocking as she floated—while a chorus of spirits winged after her, higher in the air. Now amidst the terrors of the storm she *flamed amazement*—now with the gentle descent of a protecting god she hung over the slumbers of Gonzalo—again in the thunder's shape (that *deep and dreadful organ-pipe*) she sounded in Alonzo's ear the "name of Prosper"—flitting in another instant across the scene, behold her resting on a leaf that she may mock with her pretty human mimicry Caliban and Stephano and Trinculo—and then, almost before thought has time to follow her, see the pert and deft little spirit performing the part of Ceres!

Meanwhile the deeply moving and imaginative strains of Purcell hummed deliciously about our ears—and the no less worthy of Shakespeare though lighter fancies of Arne (answering, as it were, to the *wings* of Ariel) varied and alternated them.<sup>2</sup> The choruses are admirably arranged—above, beneath, on either side, or from the depths of

<sup>1</sup> Miss Priscilla Horton, afterwards Mrs. German Reed, was a charming comedian. She made her first appearance about 1834, and remained on the regular stage till 1858. She then became a leading spirit in the German Reed productions till 1879, when she retired. She died 1895.

<sup>2</sup> The music was selected from the works of Purcell, Linley, and Arne.

Prospero's cell—they fill the air. The scenes, too, are deliciously painted, and reflect honour on Mr. Marshall,<sup>1</sup> whose name should be remembered as the painter. At one moment a rich fairyland starts into shape before us—then the fantastic and varying tints of enchantment vanish, and on a bare and rocky strand, amongst strange volcanic vestiges, we can see “not a twig,” no, not one, to withhold Trinculo from the scurvy shelter of the gaberdine of Caliban. It will be noted as an exquisite piece of art in the painter that in nearly every one of these scenes of Prospero's Island odd fantastic shapes may be conjured up out of the various trees or rocky passes—as though the sylphs that dwelt there had gambolled and twisted them into sylph-like meanings.

The Masque is given as Shakespeare wrote it; with beautiful landscapes, brown and blue, such as Titian would have beheld with pleasure; and Goddesses developed from balmy cloudy to words as mild—

“Ceres, most bounteous lady, thy rich leas  
Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats, and pease;  
*Thy turfy mountains where live nibbling sheep,*  
The flat meads thatch'd with stover, them to keep;  
*Thy banks with peonied and lilied<sup>2</sup> brims,*  
Which spongy April at thy 'hest betrimms,  
*To make cold nymphs chaste crowns;* and thy brown<sup>3</sup> groves  
*Whose shadow the dismissed bachelor loves,*  
Being lass lorn; thy pole-clipt vineyard;  
And thy sea marge, *steril and rocky-hard—*

<sup>1</sup> Marshall was the scene-painter at Covent Garden when Macready took the theatre in 1837, and was retained by him in that position.

<sup>2</sup> “Pioned and twilled” in First Folio and most editions. “Lilied” is Steevens' suggestion.

<sup>3</sup> “Broom groves” in First Folio. “Brown” is Hanmer's suggestion.

all were there ! And Iris herself, who says all this, was there, even as the grateful Ceres names her—

*“ Who, with thy saffron wings, upon my flowers  
Diffusest honey-drops, refreshing showers,  
And with each end of thy blue bow dost crown  
My bosky acres and my unshrubbed down,  
Rich scarf to my proud earth.”*

What a delight it is to transcribe such words as these—what a pride to speak the language he spoke who wrote them !

Mr. Macready moved among all this, with admirable fitness, the Enchanter and Prospero of the night. His performance was very beautiful. His various expression to the inferior creatures around him—to the objects of his affection, the victims of his art, or the ministers of his will—was touched with truth as various. He was indeed a mild Avenger, a dignified Enchanter, a most paternal Sire. Nor should we omit to notice that new resource of art by which he gave us a sort of new thought of Prospero—that kind of habitual melancholy there was, in his most pleased anticipations, so touchingly characteristic of the man who had so long kept company with sad thoughts, and who, also, we can well perceive, had acquired a little more knowledge than was quite easy to his sense of right.

We must name Mr. George Bennett's Caliban next—the best Caliban that has been seen since the days of Emery—albeit at times a little too enunciative and syllabical in his delivery, yet redeeming himself the next minute with a genuine humano-brutality and yearning wonderment. His first discovery in the hole where he is “styed” was singularly picturesque, nor less so was his manner of grabbling out of it to fly on Prospero, whose wand in a



moment flung the danger of his fury down, and left him merely *dancing mad* with impotent rage. Then we should not fail to mention Mr. Bartley's Stephano, as right sailor-like, robust and hearty; Mr. Harley's<sup>1</sup> Trinculo, which is quaint and astonished as becomes Harleyism in contact with a "monster"; and last, not least, Miss Helen Faucit's<sup>2</sup> Miranda, and Mr. Anderson's Ferdinand. Miss Helen Faucit, in this character, has not had justice done to her. She seemed to us to second the gentlemanly love of Mr. Anderson with just such tones of trusting impulse as peculiarly fitted her for Miranda.

Miss Priscilla Horton received first mention in this notice and is entitled to the last. Her Ariel is perfectly charming. She seems fairly inspired by its pretty wilfulness and submissive animal spirits—which can so well afford to make the best of a compulsion. That beautiful touch at the end of one of the scenes, when the "tricksy spirit," as it is going off, suddenly turns round to Prospero, and says—

"Do ye love me, master? No"—

could not have been better given, with a more pretty, winning contradiction of its own doubt—had the clever little actress never studied it at all, but acted only from the womanly impulse of the moment.

All the world will go to see the *Tempest*. It is a day-dream realised for all eyes and hearts, from the poet or the courtier, down to the

<sup>1</sup> John Pritt Harley (1790-1858) was a vivacious and quaint actor of great versatility.

<sup>2</sup> Helen Faucit (Lady Martin) made her first regular appearance in 1836, when only sixteen years old. She rapidly rose in her profession and, under Macready's management, became the leading English actress of her day. In 1851 she married (Sir) Theodore Martin.

“Sun-burn’d sicklemen, of autumn weary”

—and if the princely heroine of a certain other “Enchanted Island” does not give it the crowning grace of her presence before long, we are no true prophets or believers.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This bid for a royal visit was unsuccessful. There was a “royal command” night on February 1, 1839, but *The Lady of Lyons*, produced in the previous season, was the play selected. *The Tempest* was performed fifty-five times.

CRITICISMS  
FROM THE "*LEADER*"  
(1850-1854).

BY  
GEORGE HENRY LEWES.



## THE ANTIGONE.

May 4, 1850.

THE *Antigone*<sup>1</sup> was regarded by ancient critics as the flower and consummation of Greek art, and if modern critics have been less enthusiastic in their admiration, it is because they could not thoroughly sympathise with its intensely Athenian ethics. Indeed their ignorance of Grecian feelings and ideas has led them almost universally to mistake its scope and bearing. But, in spite of this misconception, the eternal beauty of the work has embalmed it. One may say, indeed, that no work can be truly great in Art that does not appeal to the sympathies of all ages and of all nations; whatever temporary or national colouring may predominate, and give it national success on its first appearance, there must also be in it the substance of eternal universal truth, or it will perish, and deserve to perish. In the *Antigone* there are two subjects which pre-eminently interested the Athenians,—the holiness of the rites of sepulture and the sanctity of the laws. These are, of course, subjects in which all civilised nations deeply sympathise; but our modern feelings very feebly represent the intensity of the Athenian feelings on those points. It is doubtless shocking to a Christian to think of a corpse of

<sup>1</sup> Drury Lane, May 1 and 3, 1850. See Note, p. 79.

a brother exposed to the wild birds, denied the rite of sepulture, and tossed upon the earth like a vile clod. Even to those who believe the soul has passed to heaven, leaving behind it nothing but a tenement of clay, there is still a sanctity in burial which draws its solemnity from our deepest instincts. Far deeper and holier were these rites to a Greek. He believed that the unburied corpse was not merely a torture to the dead, by condemning him to wander forlorn upon the Stygian banks, unable to pass to Hades for a hundred years; it was also an outrage to the Infernal Deities who claimed those rites. Hence the excessive importance given in Homer and the tragedians to the rescue of the slain and the ensurance of burial. So also an European understands the feeling of respect for the laws, but in far less absolute manner than that which actuated the democratic Athenian. With us laws are, after all, but human consents; with the Athenians they were almost divine. To obey them, even when unjust, was virtue; to disregard them was crime.

Herein lies the grand tragic collision of the *Antigone*. Polynices has waged war against his brother and his country. Both brothers fall; and Creon the new King, following the laws, ordains that Polynices for his treason shall be denied the rites of sepulture. Antigone knows full well the justice of the edict, but she braves it; she buries her brother, and is punished for her disobedience by death. Antigone—and critics have overlooked this—never disguises from herself that she is criminal in her disobedience, she calls her act a “pious crime.” This is the tragic motive. Had she thought the edict unjust her conduct would have been simple; but she knew the edict was just according to all human justice, and at the same time she knew it was unjust according to all divine justice. The state had



ordained a punishment; but the Gods claimed their rites. In this complex feeling lies the pathos; in her opposition to Creon there is a collision of duty with duty, will with will. Creon is not a tyrant, as modern critics, with strange forgetfulness of Greek politics, assert; he is but the exponent of the law, and is supported by the whole nation; even Antigone's sister bows to the decision. Antigone alone, moved by the impulse of affection, and bringing into view the equally imperative claims of the Gods, braves the laws and suffers the penalty.

Even to our feelings the collision between Antigone and Creon is powerful, though of course infinitely less so than it was to the Athenians; and in this play there are other chords sounded to which all hearts vibrate a response. The energy of Antigone, and her thoroughly human womanly nature, contrasted with that of her gentle and devoted sister, presents the dramatic art of Sophocles on a par with that of Shakespeare. How delicately and profoundly observed is the distinction between them,—Antigone at first vehement, intense, spasmodic, bent on the one object of burying her brother, reckless as to consequences; but no sooner is the object attained than her womanly nature reappears, and she shudders at death, resists it, wails over her lot, and all her fierceness melts in tears. Ismene, on the contrary, is at first timid, dares not disobey the laws, shrinks like a woman from rebellion; yet when the deed is done meets consequences with a calm and resolute front: a *patient* womanly nature from first to last.

We mentioned Shakespeare. Is not the change indicated in Antigone analogous to that in Lady Macbeth? She too is fierce and relentless till the deed is done; in both women the fierceness is spasmodic—it is feminine vehemence concentrated in one absorbing project. When all is over

both relapse into weakness. Lady Macbeth has troubled dreams which break her agonised heart; Antigone dies despairing.

But we have no space to speak worthily of this magnificent work. The reproduction of it at Drury Lane will afford our readers an opportunity of seeing it in action, and they will be struck with the freshness and eternal youth of this antique poem. Miss Vandenhoff has carefully studied the part, and throws herself into some picturesque attitudes; at times she reminded us of the figures on the ancient vases; but her conception is so different from our own that we forbear criticism. It was not a performance that greatly impressed us.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Vandenhoff performed his part with solid dignity and picturesque effect. Creon in Sophocles is not a tyrant but "every inch a king." The choruses by Mendelssohn are well known to the musical world, and have been long enough before us to enable us to say, without the suspicion of one day reversing the judgment when familiarity has opened their beauties to us, that they are the mediocrities of a man of genius; all their science cannot cover their commonplace and want of melodic invention.

<sup>1</sup> This was not Miss Vandenhoff's first appearance as Antigone. She made a striking success in the part at Covent Garden, January 2, 1845, under Laurent's management, repeating it about thirty times.

## MANAGERIAL POLICY.

May 11, 1850.

DRURY LANE<sup>1</sup> has terminated its lingering and profitless existence; yet not profitless if managers would learn a lesson from its fate. Nothing could exceed the enthusiasm of its opening, and the success was immense; but Mr. Anderson, instead of gaining courage by success, slept upon it. His whole management was singularly injudicious.

<sup>1</sup> James Anderson (1809-1895) entered upon management at Drury Lane, December 26, 1849, opening with *The Merchant of Venice* and a pantomime. "In this labour of love," said his manifesto, "the lessee addresses himself for courage and support to those who, not ashamed of being out of fashion, still cherish an affectionate regard for that art, the patronage of which has ever by polished nations been valued as the surest means of reflecting honour on themselves, in the exhibition of their achieved civilisation and mental cultivation. . . . The truly generous efforts which have been made in the highest quarter to revive a taste for the legitimate drama have been productive of the happiest effects. The time has at length arrived when the English people, animated by a bright example, demand the restoration on the stage of their national theatre and drama, which is the pride of this as it is the envy of every other nation." In the course of the season, *As You Like It*, *Othello*, *Julius Cæsar*, and *Hamlet* were presented, with such stock pieces as *The Gamester*, *The Stranger*, *Jane Shore*, *The Hypocrite*, *The Hunchback*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Fazio*, *Ion*, and, by way of novelties, Schiller's *Fiesco*, Fletcher's *Elder Brother*, and the *Antigone* (see preceding article). The "new play" alluded to was *The Passing Cloud*, by Bayle Bernard (produced April 8), which dealt with a subject something like that of *La Morte Civile*. The season closed on Saturday, May 4, but this was not, as Lewes seems to have anticipated, the end of Anderson's management. He re-opened the theatre on Boxing Night, 1850, with *A Winter's Tale*, and carried it on till June 24, 1851. On Boxing Night, 1851, Alfred Bunn succeeded to the management. Anderson is said to have lost £9000 in his two seasons.

He produced but one new play—and such a play! His revivals were neither well chosen, well mounted, nor well played. The pantomime and Easter piece were got up with magnificence, and *they* drew audiences. But his revivals were costly and profitless. Again, we must insist upon this obvious fact: a theatre can only prosper when it has fine acting, magnificent spectacle, or novelty. The acting was mediocre; the spectacle (except in the Easter piece) was not gorgeous enough to be attractive, and was, therefore, only a heavy expense; and novelty there was none.

Mr. Charles Kean, who is about to open a campaign at the Princess's Theatre,<sup>1</sup> with every chance in his favour—and the public decidedly with him—will do well to ponder on the fate of Drury Lane. He has determined, we hear, upon one excellent principle, that of giving *novelties* of various kinds, Bulwer, Jerrold, and Lovell having, as we stated weeks ago, already furnished him with pieces to begin upon. We suggest that the experiment be fairly tried, and that in lieu of spending thousands upon decorations, he spend half the sum on new plays, for people will go to see a *new* play; whereas, however they may be delighted with it when they see it, they do *not* go merely for the “getting up.” Splendid scenery and costly dresses draw down momentary plaudits and paragraphs from the papers; but unless the spectacle be so extraordinary as to excite a sensation—like the *Island of Jewels*,<sup>2</sup> for example—not a soul enters the theatre drawn there by that.<sup>3</sup> We hear the Keans, who are now starring in the provinces, have

<sup>1</sup> For the opening night of Charles Kean's season, see page 104.

<sup>2</sup> Extravaganza by Planché, Lyceum, Boxing Night, 1849.

<sup>3</sup> This reads like prophetic satire when we remember how the Keans did rely on gorgeous settings to their productions.

made several promising engagements; notably, three beautiful young women. Beauty is essential in a theatre.

## RACHEL'S PHÈDRE AND ROXANE.

July 6, 1850.

A CROWDED house welcomed the great tragic actress<sup>1</sup> on Monday night;<sup>2</sup> but although she was called for at the end of the second, fourth, and fifth acts to receive the applause of her admirers,—although the murmur and the shudder which from time to time ran through the audience showed that she was appreciated by some present—yet there was no enthusiasm, no tumult of applause such as proceeds from an entire audience wrought to excitement by a powerful artist. Whose the fault? Was Rachel incompetent to produce a grand effect, or were the people incompetent to understand it? Considering the amount of knowledge and taste usually displayed on the subject of the French Drama, and bearing in view the assiduity with which every third spectator *read* the play while it was going forward, our verdict is unequivocal. Of the few persons in the theatre competent to appreciate a fine work of art, there was [only] a small section who could pretend to relish Racine. The answer is always ready: French Art is *so* French (as if *that* were wonderful!) and so unnatural (as if the aim of Art was to be natural!) and so cold (especially to us who do not *feel* the language!). These critics never ask themselves how it

<sup>1</sup> Elisa Rachel Félix, to give her her full name, was born in 1820 in Switzerland, and first appeared on the stage in 1833, but did not make her great success till 1838. She died in 1858.

<sup>2</sup> At the St. James's Theatre, July 1. These French plays were given under the management of Mr. Mitchell of Bond Street. Régnier, Lafont, Mdlle. Nathalie, and others had already appeared this season.



is that a work of art like the *Phèdre* can have withstood the tests of criticism, fluctuations of opinion, and schoolboy familiarity for nearly two centuries, incessantly performed, incessantly read, once the delight of all Europe and ever the glory and delight of France, and yet be a cold, unnatural, uninteresting production. Excellent critics! They form their views of Art exclusively upon the Shakespeare model, and aiding their prejudices with an adequate ignorance of the language (though invariably "mistaken for Frenchmen"! ) pronounce Racine no poet. Schiller and Goethe may be tolerated because they are Shakespearean; Sophocles also gets a good word on the same ground; while Calderon is spoken of with reverence, because the Schlegels in a delirium of error pronounced him equal to—nay, superior to Shakespeare! As for Alfieri, Racine, and Corneille, they are scouted because they are not Shakespearean. In the same Catholic spirit, Titian is held of no account by some who worship Raffaele; Caravaggio "wants art," because he has not the manner of Correggio.

We have indicated the current opinion to explain why Rachel is not properly appreciated. You cannot be intensely excited by a work you do not understand. Nor is it the best way to judge of an actress to keep your eyes fixed upon a book (we once saw a lady in a private box not content with her book, but absolutely hunting out the words in her dictionary!) when so eloquent a book is before you in her face. Nevertheless, there were persons in the house who did feel the greatness of the art they witnessed, who were moved to the very depths, whose murmurs and bursts of applause told how their souls were thrilled; and even our friends whose eyes were fixed upon their books were sufficiently moved by the mere tones of her voice, the passion of her speech so eloquently expressing the passion



of the poetry, to bravo and clap their hands with something like enthusiasm.

Nothing finer could be seen than this picture of the unutterable mournfulness and yielding despair of a soul torn with an incestuous passion, conscious of its guilt, struggling with its guilt, yet so filled with it, so moved by it, so possessed by it, that the verse was realised :—

“C’est Vénus toute entière à sa proie attachée.”

Her entrance as she appeared, wasting away with the fire that consumed her, standing on the verge of the grave, her face pallid, her eyes hot, her arms and hands emaciated, filled us with a ghastly horror ; and the slow, deep, mournful toning of the apostrophe to the sun, especially in that closing line,—

“Soleil, je te viens voir pour la dernière fois,”

produced a thrill, such as no *spoken* language seemed capable of producing : one looks to music only for such emotion. Then, again, how exquisitely remorseful and pathetic the lines :—

“Grâces aux ciels, mes mains ne sont point criminelles—  
Plût aux Dieux que mon cœur fût innocent comme elles,”

(which is a beautiful rendering of the line in Euripides, *χεῖρες μὲν ἀγναὶ, φρὴν δ’ ἔχει μιάσματι*).<sup>1</sup> But the whole of this scene was inexpressibly affecting, and in gesture, look, tone, and conception in the very highest style of tragic art. There was but one defect (the *Times* considers it a beauty), and that was the mode of uttering the famous *C’est toi qui l’as nommé*, which we take to have been a misconception of its meaning, the more remarkable from

<sup>1</sup> *Hippolytus*, l. 317.

the intense truth with which she gave the hurrying horror of the preceding lines, where with a shiver between each phrase, yet irresistibly impelled to utter her thoughts, she said :—

“ Tu vas ouïr le comble des horreurs.  
J’aime . . . à ce nom fatal je tremble, je frissonne.  
J’aime . . .

ŒNONE. Qui ?

PHÈDRE. Tu connais ce fils de l’Amazone,  
Ce prince si longtemps par moi-même opprimé.

ŒNONE. Hippolyte ? Grand dieux !

PHÈDRE. *C’est toi qui l’as nommé !*”

This she uttered in a sorrowfully reproachful tone, “which,” says the *Times*, “was beautifully touching.” It *was* so; but is that Racine’s meaning? Ought not the line to be uttered with a sort of eager throwing upon Œnone of all the horror of the thing by *naming* it?<sup>1</sup> She has kept her love long a secret; it is a crime; to utter it is horrible; and Œnone utters it by naming Hippolyte. The meaning is, ’Tis you, not I, that have dared to mention his name. This meaning we take to be also that of Euripides in the passage from which Racine translated it: σοῦ τὰδ’, οὐκ ἐμοῦ κλύεις.<sup>2</sup> Otherwise a fine dramatic touch is lost; and instead of a subtle exhibition of the sophistication of passion we have a commonplace line.

In the second act, where she declares her passion, Rachel was transcendent. There was a subtle indication of the *diseased* passion, of its fiery but unhealthy—irresistible and yet odious—character, in the febrile energy with which she portrayed it. It was terrible in its vehemence and abandon-

<sup>1</sup> Sarah Bernhardt speaks the words with a deep shudder of horror, her face averted from Œnone.

<sup>2</sup> Line 352.

ment; eloquent in its horror; fierce and rapid, as if the thoughts were crowding upon her brain in tumult, and varied with such amazing compass of tones, that when she left the scene our nerves were quivering with excitement almost insupportable. The storm of rage, jealousy, and despair lit up the fourth act as with flashes of lightning. Every one who has seen Rachel will remember the intense expression she throws into single words, varying thus the music of her delivery; but we never remember anything so terrific as her

*"Misérable! et je vis!"*

Other passages we have been accustomed to hear her deliver with more effect than on Monday—indeed the traces of ill-health or of declining power were very visible—but this one passage reached the very height of passionate power.

The other performers were indifferent. Now, indifferent acting can be put up with in Shakespeare, but in Racine it is fatal. Unless those beautiful verses are spoken with an excellent gusto, a sort of *song*—which unhappily those who strive after it mistake for *sing-song*—and unless this *ideal world* be represented in an *ideal manner*, it becomes excessively uninteresting. This is not the poet's fault, however. Give Racine to actors of anything like the calibre of Rachel, and what a consummation of delight would result!

On Wednesday [July 3] Rachel performed Roxane in *Bajazet*. It is in striking contrast with her Phèdre. She is a born empress. Her grace, her *distinction*, her simple dignity, the ineffable majesty of her attitudes and gestures, crowned as they are by that small but singularly intellectual head, make her the most queenly woman now to be seen anywhere. *Where* has she learnt her dignity? It was given her by God! This little Jewess picked up from the streets, whose face would be common and insignificant

were it not lighted up with an expression which makes it ever-memorable, she carries herself with more queenly grace of deportment than any throned monarch. Her most enchanting quality is after all perhaps her grace.

Roxane is a fine part, but not one of her finest. Who ever will forget the tone in which she utters the words "*une rivale*," a tone so pregnant with the exasperation of jealous scorn? Or the intensity of her reproach—

"*Lâche*, indigne du jour que je t'avais laissé."

Or the calm settled irony, making one's blood run cold, of her reply to Atalide's assurance that he loves her still,

"Il y va de sa vie, au moins, que je le croie."

The famous point—"Sortez!"—was given with incomparable dignity; and equally fine in its way [was] her handling of the letter which is brought to her as found upon Atalide and written by Bajazet. She shadowed out the marvellous tampering with the heart, the irritable sophistication of one dreading to be undeceived yet unable to shut her eyes to the horrible fact, crumpling the letter, trying to despise it, yet irresistibly attracted towards it.

#### RACHEL AND HER ADMIRERS—"ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR."

July 13, 1850.

THE performance of *Polyeucte*<sup>1</sup> gave the audience an opportunity of estimating the immense superiority of Racine over Corneille. This opinion would be heresy in France, for there the *soldatesque* swagger of Corneille rouses men to

<sup>1</sup> Friday, July 5.

transports; but in England most unprejudiced minds will prefer the passionate poetry of Racine, instinct with life and emotion, to the lawyer-like poetry of Corneille, always casuistical when it should be emotive, always hard, abrupt, and grandiloquent. There are, it is true, magnificent *passages* in Corneille; and a virile spirit animates his dramas, which made the great Condé say that his was the true language of heroes; but, tiresome to read, his plays are to us generally insupportable on the stage. *Polyeucte* is a favourite play; and the subject is capable of great tragic collision; but Corneille makes the collision more a matter of argument than of passion. Rachel, however, is so masterly an actress that *her* scenes were interesting; and the closing burst, when, baptised in the blood of her martyred husband, she becomes a Christian, was delivered with terrific power; her utterance of

“Son sang, dont tes bourreaux viennent de me couvrir  
M’a dessillé les yeux, et me les vient d’ouvrir.  
*Je vois, je sais, JE CROIS !*”

especially the last line, with its mounting exultation and radiant glory, her face lighted up with a fervour which was irresistible, her whole frame convulsed with fanaticism, produced such an effect upon the audience as we have seldom witnessed, and they burst forth into applause which lasted some minutes. After that word *je crois* everything must be an anti-climax; yet she managed to produce another effect, also very powerful, by the close of her speech, in which she raised her arms to heaven, while her face breathed such fervent aspiration that she seemed like a martyr welcoming death as the portal through which to pass into heaven. It may look like an exaggeration, but we assure you it was well worth the price of admission and

sitting out five acts of Corneille to hear that one word "*je crois!*" One of Voltaire's notes on this play we must touch upon, as we last week had a laugh at the accuracy with which Frenchmen spell English. On the word "*oyez*" he notes that it is now no longer used except at the Bar; but the English have preserved it—"les huissiers disent *oiss*, sans savoir ce qu'ils disent!" Who would suspect *oiss* to be *oyes*?

Rachel also appeared on the same evening in a one-act classical comedy, *Le Moineau de Lesbie*,<sup>1</sup> an agreeable trifle enough, but more French than Roman. Every one remembers the ode of Catullus—

"Lugete, ô Veneres, Cupidinesque"—

one of the pretty delicate bits of sentiment with which he occasionally varies the dirt that soils his pages; and it is the death of this sparrow which Lesbia loved that forms the pivot of the new drama. Catullus is going to be married; Lesbia hears of it and is plunged in grief; her sparrow—his present—dies in its golden cage, and the lovers are reconciled and the marriage put off. It is a mere trifle, but Rachel's acting makes it a gem. Tenderness is not her forte; gaiety is quite beyond her; nor will her thin and tragic face—beautiful as it is under certain aspects—adapt itself to the luxurious indolence and voluptuous languor of a Roman courtesan. But the irony and superiority of her bearing towards the gallants, and the touching truth and naturalness of her grief and joy in the scenes with Catullus, were equal to any of her finest passages.

On Monday [July 8] *Adrienne Lecouvreur*<sup>2</sup> was produced.

<sup>1</sup> By Armand Barthet.

<sup>2</sup> By Scribe and Legouv  . It was produced at the Th   tre-Fran  ais, April 14, 1849. An adaptation of it, entitled *The Reigning Favourite*, was produced at the Strand Theatre on July 15, 1850, Mrs. Stirling playing Adrienne.



The fact of its being a modern drama and "not one of those stupid classical" pieces had excited considerable expectations; not that the audience knew anything about Adrienne as an historical person, or about the drama as a drama—enough for them that the piece was not classical! Yet, to those familiar with the name of Adrienne Lecouvreur, there were associations of a quite peculiar interest. In the first place we were curious to see how Rachel, the great tragedian, would invest herself with the personage of Adrienne the great actress; Adrienne who produced a revolution in style not less remarkable than that produced not many years since by the little Jewess whom we now applaud; Adrienne who, while the Duclos was in all her favour, dared to be simple, natural, passionate, and carried the audience by storm; Adrienne who, like Rachel, was so great in Pauline, Roxane, Cornélie, Camille—Adrienne, in short, who named among her admirers, friends, and lovers, the critic and poet Voltaire! In the next place, Adrienne, among her numerous lovers, selected one as the object of profound idolatry, such as no ill-treatment, no infidelity, could diminish; and that lover was Maurice, Maréchal de Saxe, the hero of Fontenoy, whose progeny was extensive, one of them being Marie Aurore, afterwards Comtesse de Horn, whose son Maurice was the father of Marie Aurore Dupin, Baronne Dudevant, illustrious all over Europe as George Sand! Here was interest enough if Scribe had but done *his* part. Unhappily, we cannot say much for *Adrienne Lecouvreur*. It is a melodramatic commonplace, admirably constructed, but vulgar and prosaic to the very core; all the old conventional stage effects are gathered together without a spark of life to animate them, and yet placed with such stage tact that they amuse. Intercepted letters, closets, meetings in the dark, misunderstand-

ings, poisonings, and delirium are stage "properties"; and Scribe, like an old hand, has availed himself of them adroitly, if mechanically. This is the story:—The *Princesse de Bouillon* (wretchedly represented by *Mademoiselle Avenel*, who, so far from representing *la grande dame*, was both pert and greasy, shrewish and cookmaidish) is in love with *Maurice de Saxe* and suspects that she has a rival; accordingly she employs her "abbé galant" to discover the secret. Her husband, the Prince, protects *La Duclos*, the tragic actress, and has furnished a charming house in the suburbs, whither they occasionally repair. To this house the Princess invites—we had nearly said commands—*Maurice*; meanwhile the Prince himself, believing that *Maurice* has robbed him of *La Duclos*, and that they are both to be found at his *petite maison*, invites the whole of the *Comédie Française* to sup there and expose *Maurice*. *Adrienne*, unconscious of the fact that *her Maurice* is the "Comte de Saxe," and anxious to see that young hero, consents to accompany them. The invention here—as throughout—is very clumsy, but the dramatic effect is certain. The Princess and *Maurice* are interrupted in their *tête-à-tête*; she flies, of course, into a closet, and *Maurice* assuring *Adrienne* upon his honour that he does not love the woman concealed in that closet, begs her to ensure her escape. *Adrienne* promises. She blows out the lights (the old trick! originally worn threadbare by *Lope de Vega*) and in the dark has an interview with her rival. This is a good situation, but it is feebly wrought. The two women become aware of their rivalry, though ignorant of each other's names: the Princess in her rage exclaims, "Je vous perdrai." *Adrienne* haughtily replies, "Et moi . . . je vous protège!" The Princess is forced to hurry away, but in the confusion lets fall her bracelet

(novel incident!), which Adrienne keeps as a clue to discover her rival. In a subsequent scene—the most dramatic of the whole—the Princess discovers Adrienne by her voice, and Adrienne discovers her by the bracelet. The two bandy sarcasms, till at length Adrienne being called upon to delight the audience with a recitation from *Phèdre*, chooses the passage beginning “Mon époux va paraître” (Act iii., scene 3), and closing with these lines which, by unequivocal gestures, she applies to the Princess, branding her with them:—

“ Je ne suis point de ces femmes hardies  
Qui, goûtant dans le crime une tranquille paix,  
Ont su se faire un front qui ne rougit jamais.”

The Princess, stung by the insult, determines upon vengeance. She sends Adrienne a poisoned bouquet; the result of which is that Adrienne, just as the author needs her, is delirious or calm, in agony or at her ease, until finally she expires in the company of her lover and friend.

Now this poor, mechanical, prosaic work, composed out of the very frippery of the stage—a work without invention, without life, without style; written in a language fit only for such ideas, with no force, felicity, or melody; with no wit, no passion, no movement; the sort of style which seldom lowers into absurdity, but never rises into excellence,—this work, we say, produces greater effect upon our *public d'élite* than *Phèdre*, *Bajazet*, or *Andromaque*! People rush to see it, salute it with salvos of applause, and retire convinced of its superiority to the “frigid classical tragedy.” We say it with grief, not unallied with contempt. To think of a small public like that of the St. James's Theatre, one necessarily selected from the educated classes, actually being so dead to all the claims of Art, in its highest expression, as to prefer the vulgar flippery of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*

to the chastened style and distilled essence of beauty of *Phèdre*, is quite exasperating. We shall be told, perhaps, that *Adrienne* is more amusing. Perhaps so; but amusing to whom? and amusing wherefore? The Ethiopian serenaders were more amusing than Beethoven, and drew greater crowds; the *Lions of Mysore* were more amusing than *Hamlet*; the Pantomime is more amusing than *Antigone*. True, most true. If you are not amused by French tragedy, say so, by all means; but submit to be told that the cause lies not in it, but in your ignorance. Madame Tussaud's waxwork would beat the Vatican out of the field upon your mode of reasoning; it appeals to the vulgarest faculties, and is amusing to them; the miracles of ancient sculpture require something more than the vulgarest perceptions before they can be relished: would you compare the two? *Phèdre* is separated from *Adrienne* by a chasm as wide, deep, and impassable as that which separates Phidias from Tussaud. Nevertheless, opinions are free; there is no disputing tastes; take your choice; only if you *do* choose the lower style, do not talk about Art. If you really prefer that long exhibition of physical agony with which the poisoned *Adrienne* excites your applause, to the exhibition of mental agony in *Phèdre*, *Camille*, *Hermione*, or *Roxane*, say so; we have no objection; we merely tell you that it is the pathos of the Hospital, not the pathos of Art! We tell you that such effects are vulgar, cheap, within reach of inferior actors who could never move a pulse in your heart by any exhibition of mental agony, and, therefore, not to be mentioned as the triumphs of a great artist like Rachel. But let us hasten to say a word about her, since for her the piece was written: she is the piece. Decidedly Jules Janin has pushed his malice beyond the limits of prudent hostility in attacking Rachel's comedy so virulently. Gaiety, the

comedy of animal spirits and geniality, we never expect to see her represent; but there is enough in the earlier scenes of her Adrienne to show that a refined and exquisite actress of high comedy is within her range. Neither her voice nor her face adapt themselves to comedy; but with her intelligence, exquisite elocution, nice sense of delicate shades, and general truthfulness, we suspect she might surpass all the Plessys, Allans, Nathalies, and Denains.<sup>1</sup> In Adrienne she was charming; tender, playful, graceful in the early scenes, impassioned in the closing scenes. We would merely suggest *en passant* that her recitation of *Les Deux Pigeons* is altogether a misconception of the naïveté of the original; assuredly Lafontaine would have been greatly astonished at hearing his *fable* made a bit of *tragedy*! Her fourth act was fine, but not great. Her fifth act, a painful simulation of physical agony and delirium, which with all its elaboration did not produce half the effect upon us of the one word "Je crois" uttered in *Polyeucte*, or of any one scene in the *Phèdre*. But, after all, why should the critic stand alone, speaking about Art to a public which does not care a jot about it, simply because it does not understand it? We are rich and can "patronise" Art: what need, therefore, to feel it? We can talk about Art, vote money

<sup>1</sup> Jeanne-Sylvanie Arnould-Plessy (b. 1819) made her début at the Théâtre-Français in 1834. She created many of Scribe's chief characters, and was especially excellent in the comedies of Marivaux. She retired in 1876. Louise Despréaux Allan (1809-1856) passed several years in St. Petersburg, where she produced the plays of Alfred de Musset, not originally intended for the stage. It was she who, on her return to France in 1847, made these comedies popular. Zaïre Martel Nathalie (1816-1885) did not enter the Théâtre-Français until 1847, became a sociétaire in 1852, and retired in 1876. Elisa Denain (b. 1823) made her first appearance at the Théâtre-Français in 1840, became a sociétaire in 1845, and quitted the stage in 1856.



for it on occasion. As for our own æsthetical taste—why —“*Tuppence more and up goes the donkey!*”—Ay! *that* is amusing: the donkey balanced on a ladder on a human chin, and “*only tuppence!*”

## RACHEL AND RACINE—MRS. GLOVER.

July 20, 1850.

WHAT a treat it was on Monday night [July 15] to hear the lovely verses of *Andromaque* after having submitted to the prose of *Adrienne Lecouvreur!* We were transported to a new world. Instead of the lax, wavering, colourless, conventional prose, the bourgeois eloquence of that *épiciier* in art named Eugène Scribe, we heard the well-known accents of a noble artist. Let no one imagine we are insensible to Scribe's merits:—his stage tact, liveliness, neatness of construction, and smartness of dialogue on occasions; a hundred successes have established his claims! But, after all is said, Scribe remains an *épiciier*—essentially a bourgeois, and not for a moment to be classed beside the great writers; whereas Racine is great among the greatest, and in the one quality most prized in Shakespeare—mastery over passion—he ranks next to Shakespeare. A pauper unpoetical language, and the peculiar impress of the Court taste of Louis XIV., may be drawbacks to our English appreciation of those works; but whoever can pierce through the outer trappings and accidents of time to the inner spirit animating a work (and this he must do with all *ancient* works), will recognise in the plays of Racine that mastery over elemental passion, and that felicity of style which keep works eternally young, preserving their freshness through all the changes of centuries, carrying



with them the same charm to-day they had two hundred years ago. We will touch upon a single point. It is frequently asserted that the greatest superiority of Shakespeare lies in his wonderful discrimination of character—his power of individualising types. Racine nowhere exhibits the like prodigality, but he exhibits the like power. Shakespeare's fools, dotards, and villains all belong to a class, yet each is individual. Iago, Richard III., and Edmund are three cold, subtle, intellectual villains; yet no one ever confounds them with each other; the same language could not indifferently be awarded them. This is not the case in Calderon's plays. His types are iterated with scarcely a variation; in *El Pintor de su Deshonra*, in *A secreto Agravio secreta Venganza*, and in *El Medico de su Honra*, it is impossible to discriminate the characters of the three wronged and avenging husbands. But in Racine we see the subtle discrimination and power of individualising critics noted in Shakespeare. He has painted in Hermione, Roxane, and Phèdre, three women in love and rejected, jealous of their fortunate rivals, and carried away by their headlong fury to the destruction of their lovers and themselves; and yet so delicately and firmly are these characters discriminated, so manifestly different are their individualities, that no one ever thought of confounding them—nay, we doubt whether the fact has even been observed of their being so similarly situated. The rage of the wronged Hermione is not the imperial anger of the wronged Roxane; the slight variation in the circumstance, viz., that Roxane has ingratitude as well as indifference to punish, is very properly suffered to operate a material variation in the feeling. Moreover, the scorn of Hermione, Phèdre, and Roxane, though so similar

in position, is so various in expression, as to become the utterance of three distinct minds: Hermione is innocent and despised, Phèdre is guilty and despised, Roxane is guilty and despised, but does not acknowledge her guilt. O snubbed but much respected reader! if you have suffered your naturally keen intellect (it *is* keen, is it not?) to be dazzled by the fireworks of criticism which that adroit showman Augustus Schlegel has let off, and which, when the smoke and light have passed away, will be found to leave a poor residuum of blackened paper—if, we say, you have been bamboozled by that archimagus, it will greatly astonish you to see Racine thus elevated above Calderon, who is “*so* Shakesperian!” Nevertheless, we are very serious. Calderon has been familiar to us for some dozen years, and we began the acquaintance with every prepossession in his favour—for why should we not confess that we, too, were bamboozled by Schlegel, *until* experience had opened our eyes? But the result has been uniformly this:—Extended knowledge and reflection have proportionately lowered our estimate of Calderon and exalted that of Racine. Take up the *Andromaque* for yourself and read it. You may not, perhaps, taste the flavour of its verse: *that* requires far deeper feeling of the language than is generally supposed; it is not enough to understand the meaning of poetry, you must also feel its music. But making all allowances, and assuming even that the poetry is “so French” and frigid, look at the *dramatic* power displayed in that piece. It has no incidents, you say? No, not one. “Business” was unknown to, or despised by, the French tragic writers: they never thought of stage tact, they thought only of emotion. If they could fill five acts with the development and fluctuations of a passion,

they had achieved their aim; and this Racine has achieved in *Andromaque*, the "construction" of which, if looked at with eyes capable of perceiving essentials, is surpassingly fine: the progress and movement of the story, the truth and fluctuations of passion, the culmination of interest, and the wide-gathering sweep of the dénouement, indicate the thought of a consummate artist. Could actors be found capable of adequately representing this tragedy, it would be one of the grandest sights in the world. Oreste was a great part of Talma's;<sup>1</sup> and when he played it the piece was subordinate to him as it now is to Rachel; but *Andromaque* is almost as fine a part as *Hermione*, and needs a great actress: here, then, three first-rate actors are required and we are fortunate if we can get one!

Rachel has played better than she did on Monday; but her worst is worth a journey to see. There were several passages which seemed to us wide of the meaning; but, inasmuch as we do not remember her to have delivered them so on former occasions, we would fain believe ill-health had something to do with it. Her last act was much feebler than usual—but observe! the feebleness of a Rachel! Had any other actress played in that style we should have pronounced it great. Her finest scenes were the two interviews with *Andromaque* and *Pyrrhus* in the third and fourth acts. In the former her withering sarcasm—so calm, so polished, so implacable—was beyond all description and above all praise; in the second she showed what an incomparable actress she is when passion, scorn, grief, and defiance are called forth. In her eyes charged with lightnings, in her thin convulsive frame, in the broken spasms

<sup>1</sup> François-Joseph Talma (1763-1826), the favourite actor of Napoleon, played in London in 1817.

of her voice as it changes from melodious clearness to a hoarseness that makes one shudder, in the grace, the fire, the fury, and the terror of that scene, she reminded us of a panther, beautiful yet terrible! How true and touching her utterance of the lines :—

“Malgré la juste horreur que son crime me donne  
Tant qu’il vivra craignez que je ne lui pardonne.  
Doutez jusqu’à sa mort d’un courroux incertain;  
S’il ne meurt aujourd’hui, *je puis l’aimer demain.*”

In that last line she crowded a world of unutterable sadness and a secret wish amidst it all *de l’aimer demain*. And, in describing how she herself will avenge the insult to her beauty by slaying Pyrrhus, the audience was roused to transport by this line :—

— “Je percerai le cœur *que je n’ai pu toucher ?*”

which was uttered with a wail so low, so musical, piercing down into the very depths of pathos, that it rang in our ears for an hour afterwards. The whole scene, as we said before, was a triumph of passion rising into that grand culmination of jealous rage when she bids him hasten to his Troyenne—

“Va, cours ; mais crains encore d’y trouver Hermione.”

Mrs. Glover<sup>1</sup> took her farewell benefit last week, but too

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Glover was born in 1781 or 1782, and made her first appearance in London in 1797. She was a famous comedian, and was specially good in such parts as Mrs. Candour and Mrs. Malaprop. Her maiden name was Betterton, but she does not seem to have been any connection of the great actor of that name. Her benefit took place at Drury Lane, Friday, July 12, 1850. She played Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals*, Farren playing Sir Anthony ; Webster, Acres ; Keeley, David ; Howe, Sir Lucius ; Alfred Wigan, Fag ; Mrs. Nisbett, Lydia Languish ; Miss Helen Faucit, Julia ; and Mrs. Keeley, Lucy. Charles Mathews and Madame Vestris appeared in *Delicate Ground*, and Sims Reeves sang.

late in the week for us to chronicle it ; and now we have to chronicle not merely *that* farèwell but a more solemn fare-well from the stage of Life, whereon hers was an arduous part. On Friday night an affecting triumph—gathering into a tumult of applause the accumulated admiration of years—and on the following Tuesday all was darkness ! Her loss will be felt in our impoverished dramatic world, for to the last she retained one quality which belongs to all fine actors but which now becomes rarer and rarer—that, namely, of *modulated elocution*, which by its varied intonations gives the play of lights and shades of meaning, and constitutes the one charm of recitation. It is in this quality that Rachel excels all living actresses. Now Mrs. Glover is gone, there is but Ellen Kean<sup>1</sup> whom we could name as thoroughly mistress of the music and the meaning which lie hidden in fine poetry. Mrs. Glover had more gusto and less manner than Ellen ; but she wanted the pathos and caressing tenderness—the tears in the voice—which give to Ellen the undisputed empire of our stage.

## RACHEL'S MARIE STUART.

July 27, 1850.

*Adrienne Lecouvreur* has carried everything before it ; and although we are glad to find people of taste tolerably unanimous in their appreciation of it, yet the great public is not formed of men of taste. As a matter of criticism, it is perhaps worth while to notice an error into which more than one critic has fallen, viz., in praising Rachel's declamation of prose. No ear sensitive to the rhythm of French prose can be flattered by her delivery, which is

<sup>1</sup> For Mrs. Kean (Ellen Tree), see p. 105.



neither poetry nor prose—which wants the song and *ictus* of verse, and the easy colloquial cadences of prose. Non-familiarity with any drama but the poetic may, in some measure, account for this defect—a defect thrown into stronger relief by the lax, uncharacteristic style of *Adrienne Lecouvreur*; but the defect is there, and should be recognised. Were the rhythmic periods of a George Sand substituted for this commonplace of Scribe, we should doubtless hear Rachel declaiming it to perfection. It is incalculable the effect upon her acting when the language is poetic. She seems to need the extra stimulus of beauty. The subtle influence of music penetrates her mind, and gives a movement to her declamation which heightens and idealises the effect. The reverse of that was felt on Wednesday [July 24] in her performance of *Marie Stuart*, a play imitated by Pierre Lebrun (do not confound him with Pigault of that name, the literary progenitor of Paul de Kock!<sup>1</sup>) from Schiller's *Maria Stuart*—a play which Talma and the Duchesnois made popular for a while by their acting, and which has been revived because its third act gives scope to Rachel's genius for sarcasm and fury. But it is feebly written, and her acting in the first scene was comparatively feeble. In the third act, Elizabeth and Mary meet in the garden: Mary endeavours at first to interest her sympathy, and even humbles herself before her cold, cruel rival, but, finding her haughty, insolent, and merciless, she flings aside all restraint, and bursts forth in a torrent of sarcasm. This is a dramatic situation well worked out. Rachel was magnificent in scorn, in vituperation, in the towering dignity of passion, and in the feverish exultation of triumph at having humbled Elizabeth in the presence of Leicester.

<sup>1</sup> And the grandfather of Émile Augier.



“J’ai porté le poignard au cœur de ma rivale”

was a blaze of triumphant fury.

After that all went slowly until the final scene, where she takes leave of her friends before quitting the world; that was delicately touched, with nice discrimination of effects, and a pathos that went home.

## THE OLD AND MODERN DRAMATISTS.

August 3, 1850.

APROPOS of Marston’s *Malcontent*, which was revived at the Olympic last Monday,<sup>1</sup> and there mercilessly murdered by the most incompetent company in London, we wish to say a word respecting our much-praised Old English Dramatists.

Light the fagots! clear your throats for execration! ransack your memory for epithets like stones to cast at our heretical heads! we are about to utter heresy of so black a dye that it will take the breath from some of you! It is nothing less than a conviction that the *greatest injury yet sustained by the English drama was the revival of admiration for the Old English Dramatists*. They were forgotten—justly so—

“Denn alles das entsteht  
Ist werth dass es zu ende geht,”

(“Nothing perishes but it deserves to perish,”—Goethe) forgotten in spite of their marvellous passages and lines of beauty, until Charles Lamb and his friends, struck with the brilliancy of the jewels cast upon these dunghills, cried out with all the quick delight of discoverers, “Here is a new world!”

<sup>1</sup> July 29, the theatre having been opened for six nights only “under the auspices of Mr. George Bolton.” None of the actors’ names are mentioned in the *Times*.

The old English dramatists were exhumed from the dust of oblivious ages, and were studied by our poets as models. Now we venture to say that more detestable models were never held up before a student's reverence; their very excellences being fatal lures. This is not the occasion for a survey of their characteristics, or a display of their peculiar infelicity as dramatists; but whoever has more than a second-hand acquaintance with Kyd, Peele, Marlowe, Webster, Dekker, Ford, Marston, Chapman, Heywood, Middleton, Shirley, Cyril Tourneur, and the rest, will probably agree with us that their plays are as poor in construction (artistic as well as theatric) as they are resplendent in imagery and weighty lines—that their characters are *sketched* rather than *developed*—that their situations for the most part are violent, horrible, and clumsily prepared, and that, besides being wearisome in reading, they are essentially unfit for the modern stage. If this be so—or but partially so—it follows that they cannot be good models for our living dramatists. The drama should be a reflex of our life, idealised, of course, but issuing out of the atmosphere we breathe. It *was* so when these writers lived: it was so in the reigns of Charles and Anne; it was so in the last century, when the British tar and British merchant were the clap-traps of the stage. These last-century tragedies and comedies are wearisome enough, 'tis true, and any escape from them might, to our young poets, have seemed an issue into a freer, healthier world. But the escape into the Old Drama was a brilliant fallacy: it was the Young Englandism<sup>1</sup> of Art: disgusted with the Present,

<sup>1</sup> "Young Englandism" in politics was a movement favoured by a number of young Tories, who wished to revive the old-fashioned relations between the upper and lower classes. It arose about 1842. "Coningsby" deals with this movement.

yet without faith in the Future, it flew into the Past. Unhappily all our poets could learn in that Old Drama was precisely that of which (if they were poets) they stood in least need, viz., poetry; finding *that* there, they learned to think that poetry was enough to make a drama! Whereas, if they had never known this Old Drama, they must perforce have created a new form, and instead of the thousand-and-one imitations of the old dramatists which the last twenty years have produced, we might have had some sterling plays. Who are the successful dramatists of our day? Precisely those who do *not* imitate the Elizabethan form! Perhaps Knowles may be cited as an exception; but his imitation really consists in quaintness of diction, not in the nature of his plots and arrangement of his subject. He succeeds by his strong *domestic* element. To appeal to the public taste, to move the general heart of men, you must quit the study, and try to image forth some reflex of the world that all men know, speaking their language, uttering their thoughts, espousing their idealisms. Racine has been blamed by short-sighted critics for making his Greeks speak like Frenchmen: he did so because he was a *poet*, not an antiquary! Had he pictured Greeks (and how easy for one so learned to have done so!) he would have committed the mistake of our modern dramatists, viz., sacrificed the present to the past. We foresee an objection drawn from the continued success of Shakespeare and Racine; and we will answer it. Not *because* of their form—of what is temporal and peculiar to their epochs in them—do these masters hold us in their spell, but *in spite of it*. If they were born into this century they would not adopt the tone of two centuries past, but do now what they did then—reflect their age. This remark will also anticipate any question as to whether we wish *drawing-room and cottage* life to be the

only sphere for a modern dramatist. We do not wish it. There is no need of abjuring the picturesque adjuncts of dress, scene, and distant time. Poetry moves more freely in a world of beauty and magnificence. But we do wish that the dramatist should not be an archæologist, that he should not strive to revive defunct forms, but produce a nineteenth century drama : something that will appeal to a wider audience than that of a few critics and black-letter students. What has prevented our poets from attempting this? A preconceived notion of the excellence of the old English Dramatists !

The Keans are to open a theatre confessedly with the intention of bringing out new plays. It is the only chance left for a theatre ; but it will require some courage to persevere, and not to be frightened at the first non-success. But, if our voice can pierce through ancient prejudices, we would earnestly counsel all aspiring dramatists to forget, if possible, that Shakespeare had contemporaries, to shun the old writers as they would the plague ; and we would whisper softly in the managerial ear, Beware of works which in critical compliment are said to be “worthy of a place beside productions of the Elizabethan age !” *Verbum sat.*

## OPENING OF THE PRINCESS'S THEATRE.

October 5, 1850.

NEVER was there a better first night!<sup>1</sup> Everybody was in high spirits, rightly attuned to enjoyment, ready to be pleased, and keeping up the ball of humour by sending it back

<sup>1</sup> September 28, 1850. This was the first night of Charles Kean's management, which continued until 1859. Keeley was for one season associated with him in the undertaking.

again winged with hearty laughter to the actors. A pleasant sight it was to see the crowded expectation of that night! Well-known faces dotted the crowd; and the dress circle presented an appearance of ladies and gentlemen seldom gracing a theatre nowadays: it was like a night of the olden times when the drama flourished. And the actors! they, too, were in high spirits, inspired by the enthusiasm that was in the air, pleased at the opening of a new temple of the art, emulous of each other, yet each rightly placed, and acting well in concert. Never do we remember to have seen *Twelfth Night* so well played; never, perhaps, was it relished with a greater gusto. It showed how much can be done by *casting* a play well. It showed, also, how much the audience can do towards creating its own enjoyment. Half the prosperity of the jests lay there. Willing to be pleased, they *were* pleased; and, pleased, they gave the actors a *verve* which made them capable of pleasing. This is the unique source of that success of "First Nights" which has so often been remarked; and this, doubtless, was something of the feeling which warmed *every* audience in the palmy days of the drama.

The play was admirably cast on the whole, well placed on the stage, with artistic elegance and sufficient splendour of scenery and costume, without prodigality or spectacle. There were some novelties in the cast. Ellen Kean<sup>1</sup> was, of course, the Viola, and played with even more than her usual delicacy and archness. In reflecting on her performance, severe criticism might suggest that the comic portions were once or twice a little out of tone—a little too roguish and confident for Viola—wanting that ideal elevation which

<sup>1</sup> Ellen Tree (Mrs. Kean) was born in 1805, and made her first London appearance in 1826. She married Charles Kean in 1842, retired from the stage at his death in 1868, and died August 21, 1880.



Shakespearian comedy demands; and yet *these* were the parts most vehemently applauded! The *look* with which she said "I am the man" was perfect; but that little saucy tap on her head, with the playful swagger which followed it, though they "brought down the house," appeared to us to betray a forgetfulness of Viola in the force of the situation—sweeping out of the ideal orbit into the lower orbit of a soubrette. We think her manner, when first introduced to Olivia, just the sort of manner Viola might have found it necessary to assume to vindicate her manhood, and Mrs. Kean rightly, therefore, throws off Viola for the nonce; but we submit that, *when alone*, Viola should absolutely throw off that assumed manner and be herself again. The exquisite verses, "She never told her love," dropped melodiously from her, and were received with tremendous applause. The ghastly terror she portrayed during the duel was most artistically relieved by little touches of comedy. Mrs. Keeley<sup>1</sup> appeared for the first time as Maria. It was bright, pert, and effective. There is an intensity in all Mrs. Keeley does and says which makes her acting *all point*. Miss Phillips was misplaced in Olivia. But who now has the youth, grace, and courtesy befitting this *nobil donna*? Keeley's Sir Andrew Aguecheek is well known as a masterpiece of imbecility and incompetence: it is a perfect study. Harley, as the Clown, played with great *verve*. Sir Toby Belch was a failure in the hands of Mr. Addison, who had not seized the part. Sir Toby should be saturated with good liquor, the energetic coarseness of his name betokens the habitual sot: the eye should wander in its

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Keeley (Mary Anne Goward) was born in 1805. She is still alive. Her husband, Robert Keeley (born 1793, died 1869) was associated with Kean in his management of the Princess's Theatre. They were a pair of consummate comedians.



uncertainty, the tongue move heavily, the gait be lax. Drink should ooze from every pore, his voice should speak of it, his whole manner should be moist. Mr. Addison was the soberest of men. His stagger had no heaviness, his manner had nothing vinous. Meadows, as Malvolio, made a decided hit. This is one of the most difficult parts in the whole range of Shakespearian noodles; and Meadows<sup>1</sup> played it with great intelligence and care. The thin, hard pomposity, the self-sufficing narrowness, the man-in-office style of loftiness, the wooden-headiness of Malvolio were given to the life; and the famous but perilous scene of the letter was a complete triumph. James Vining was a lively Fabian, Ryder a picturesque Captain, and Cathcart a very creditable Sebastian. Altogether the comedy went off with amazing spirit.

## CHARLES KEAN'S HAMLET.

*October 12, 1850.*

OF all Shakespeare's male characters Hamlet is the most fascinating, the most perplexing, the most various, and the most thoroughly identified in the national mind with its creator's genius. No wonder, therefore, if it has at all times been the ambition of actors to represent it; no wonder if actors, one and all, have failed to personate it in a thoroughly satisfactory manner. We have seen many Hamlets, both in England and in Germany: one played this scene well, another uttered that soliloquy to perfection, but they all, without exception, impressed us with a sense of incompleteness, and, to some extent, of misconception.

<sup>1</sup> Drinkwater Meadows (1799-1869), "a careful, conscientious, and trustworthy actor."

This by way of preface to a consideration of Charles Kean's Hamlet<sup>1</sup>—by far the best now on the English stage. Twice within the week we have watched it carefully, and all that follows will be understood as the expression of a deliberately formed opinion. Charles Kean has, by arduous labour and constant practice in a very few parts, secured for himself all that stage practice can give a man, and it may well be supposed that he has not studied and played Hamlet many hundred nights without having by this time settled, in his own mind, the meaning of every passage, and the effect which he is capable of giving to it. Some years ago we thought his Hamlet a very poor performance. It has become great in comparison, but it still falls short of that standard which is set up in our minds, it does not "body forth" the poet's creation, it does not throw light upon the dark because profound passages of the text, it does not leave us satisfied. At the opening of the play Hamlet is grave with the gloom of a father's sudden death, and the gloom is deepened and embittered by the indelicate marriage of his mother with his uncle. The world has become weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable to him. Woman has, in the person of his mother, been smitten from the pedestal whereon his love had placed her, to fall down and worship, and her name has become the synonym of Frailty. Were it not that God had "fix'd his canon 'gainst self-slaughter," this gloom and bitterness would seek an issue in death; but he resolves to suffer all in silence. In the representation of this settled sorrow Charles Kean is unsurpassed. The tones of his voice in which he answers, "Ay, madam, it is common," and "I prithee do not mock me, fellow-student; I think it was to see my mother's wedding," together with the look of painful disbelief of Horatio—as

<sup>1</sup> Princess's, September 30, 1850.

if his soul, throwing off its load for a while to interest itself in friendship, was suddenly checked, and flung back again upon the woe it tried to escape—were most effective touches. But this state of Hamlet's mind is only preparatory. It bears the same relation to the subsequent acts as the solemn, ghostly opening scenes, with their awful revelations, bear to the scenes of madness and crime which follow. The play opens on the platform of the castle of Elsinore. It is the depth of midnight; the sentinel pacing to and fro is nipped with cold, and shivering with vague terrors: not a mouse stirring! The silence is broken only by the regular footstep on the platform, and the hoarse sullen murmurs of the Baltic raving below. On this scene appears the Ghost. He reveals the crime which sent him from the world, and then the storm and terror of the play begins; then come the madness of Hamlet, the conviction of the King, the murder of Polonius, the ravings of Ophelia, the gravediggers casting skulls upon the stage and desecrating the graveyard with their jesting, Ophelia's funeral interrupted and disgraced by a hideous quarrel, and, finally, the general massacre of the last scene! The same ascension from settled gloom to wild and whirling horror and madness may be seen in Hamlet. After the visitation of the Ghost, Hamlet is a *changed man*. His sorrowing nature has been ploughed to its depths by a horror so great that his distended brain refuses every alternate moment to credit it: the shock has unsettled his reason. If he is not mad, he is at any rate in such a state of irrepressible excitement that to feign madness seems the only possible relief to him. This is the point where our differences from Charles Kean's version take their rise. He may not agree with us that Hamlet was really mad; though, unless Shakespeare is to be set down as a bungler, we think that we could bring a

mass of evidence wholly irresistible to prove that Hamlet was in a state of cerebral excitement not distinguishable from insanity; but we waive the point, and admit that he was perfectly sane, and still the fact remains that, *after* the revelations of the Ghost, Hamlet must be in a totally different condition of mind from what he was before. The difference Charles Kean does not represent. The *same* gloom over-shadows him when alone; the *same* expression of face accompanies him. Instead of the agonised soul of a son in presence of an adulterous mother and a murderous uncle, he exhibits the concentrated sorrow of the first act, diversified only by the outbreaks of assumed madness. He does not depict the hurrying agitation of thoughts that dare not settle on the one horror which, nevertheless, they cannot escape. The excitement, even as simple excitement, is not represented; and thus neither the meaning of the assumed madness, nor the effects of the Ghost's revelations are apparent in his acting. Indeed, Charles Kean seems to have no *mastery* over emotion. He can portray a fixed condition of mind, but not its fluctuations. He can be passionate, sorrowful, but he cannot let the emotions *play* in his face and tones. There are flashes, but no fusion. All the early portions of Hamlet he plays with a subdued melancholy which is perfectly in place and very effective; but one detail will explain our objections, and it shall be taken from the very scene where the *change* is most imperative. The Ghost having narrated his terrible story vanishes, leaving Hamlet in a state of bewildering horror. To show how completely unsettled Hamlet's reason is by the apparition, we need not refer to his incoherent ramblings which draw forth Horatio's remark, we will refer to his language in addressing the Ghost as "old truepenny!" "old mole!" and the "fellow in the cellarage,"—imagine Hamlet sane,

and speaking thus! The language indicates a bewilderment and distraction which the actor should make apparent in his manner; but so far from this, Charles Kean kneels to the Ghost as he departs; remains sobbing with his hands covering his face for a few seconds, as if grief, not horror, were the feeling of the time, and makes a *literal* application of the words—

“ Hold, hold my heart ;  
And you my sinews grow not instant old  
But bear me stiffly up ! ”

*rising* at the last line. All which we hold to be a misconception of the situation. Throughout the rest of his performance we miss the one essential element of a changed condition (madness or not, it matters little) consequent upon the revelations of the Ghost. It is *vehement* enough—sometimes too vehement—but not *wild* enough—an important distinction. Nor is this wildness the only omission. Hamlet’s subsequent career should be impregnated with the horror, the feverish desire for revenge, and the alternations of doubt as to whether, after all, he is not the plaything of his own imagination, whether the Ghost’s story is *true* or not: thus his tone of thought should not only be agitated, it should be intensified. Charles Kean is not mad enough, not sceptical enough, nor intense enough. There is one “point” which he makes, and is applauded for, which we cannot understand. In the famous outburst, “O what a rogue and peasant slave am I,” he delivers the words—

“ Bloody, bawdy villain !  
Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain ! ”

with great vehemence until he comes to the word “kindless,” and then, pausing, sobs it forth into his handkerchief, as if his uncle’s unkindness had then, for the first moment,



occurred to him. But, surely, Hamlet is in no mood for tears: his sorrow lies too deep for that; and, moreover, the word "kindless" here, we take it, means not "unkind," but "inhuman." *Kind* is frequently used by the old writers in the sense of *nature*, thus in *Ferrex and Porrex*:—

"In kinde a father, not in kindlinesse."

Our space forbids entering upon the other details we had noted both for approval and dissent; but we will say, generally, that we not only miss in the performance the psychological modifications above noted, but also the princely courtesy and grave gaiety, like a smile on a sad face, of Shakespeare's Hamlet when he unbends. The scene with Ophelia is the best, after the opening scenes, and plainly indicates the heart that is breaking underneath the harshness; there is also more *wildness* in this interview than elsewhere. On the whole, Charles Kean's Hamlet, though not the Hamlet of Shakespeare, as *we* understand him, is a far more satisfactory performance than Macready's: it lies very open to criticism as a conception, no less than in its details of execution; but it is an elaborate and in many places effective representation of a part in which no man thoroughly succeeds, and few men altogether fail.

### MACREADY'S SHYLOCK.<sup>1</sup>

*November 9, 1850.*

PERHAPS, of all Shakespeare's leading characters, Shylock is the easiest of comprehension: drawn with firm bold

<sup>1</sup> Macready was now fulfilling a farewell engagement at the Haymarket. It began with *Macbeth* on October 28, 1850, and ended with *Lear* on February 3, 1851. His final farewell to the stage took place at Drury Lane, February 26, 1851, when he played *Macbeth*.



strokes, it is more *scolpito* than the rest, and is not perplexed by the same involved complication of motives which renders Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, Lear, and Leontes so easily misunderstood. Shylock stands as the representative of a persecuted race. Despised and hated by all around him, his religion scorned, his bargains thwarted, his losses mocked at, his friends set against him, his enemies heated, and all because he is a Jew! Even the mild and good Antonio—the pattern man of Venice—likened unto the best of ancient Romans—even he spits upon Shylock’s gaberdine, and calls him “misbeliever, cut-throat dog.” What is the consequence? Shylock, to hereditary hatred of the Christians, adds his own personal wrongs, and his malignity is the accumulation of years of outrage silently brooding in his soul. Much has he borne “with a patient shrug.”

“For sufferance is the badge of all our tribe.”

But as a Jew and as a man the incessant insults have made him lust for vengeance. Hence his exultant cry,

“If I can catch him once upon the hip,  
I will *feed fat the ancient grudge* I bear him.”

He does catch Antonio on the hip. The man who hates the Jew’s “sacred nation,” and rails at him for his “usury,” has fallen into his power; and so fierce, so relentless, is his lust for vengeance that it conquers even his passion of avarice, and he refuses thrice the sum of his bond. Observe, in the great anguish of his heart at the loss of his daughter, the lost ducats hold an almost equal share; yet even his ducats he will lose rather than lose his vengeance on Antonio!

Nothing can, I think, be clearer than the malignity of Shakespeare’s Jew, and its justification. We may perfectly

acquit Shylock of being a "demon," though we admit the fierceness of his malignity. I put in this clause for a reason which will soon be apparent. I want to keep Shylock's human nature steadily in view.

Does Macready represent the Shylock of Shakespeare? To my apprehension not at all. It is a part in which even staunch thorough-going admirers do not applaud him; and the secret of his failure, I take it, lies in a radical misconception of the character; for assuredly so fine an actor could not be feeble in a part he truly seized. His Shylock is flat and ineffective; yet, as his ingenious critic in the *Times* observes, it is a logical carrying out of his conception. *There*, then, lies the error—*principium et fons*. Macready drops the malignity of the part, and makes Shylock argue the question as if it were a matter of abstract injustice rather than one of personal outrage: hence the flatness of his opening scene—that scene in which Kean was so terrific in sarcasm!—and the strange misconception of the trial scene, where, instead of gloating upon his coming vengeance, instead of eyeing Antonio with exultant vindictiveness, he remains lost in abstraction and is roused from it only into bursts of irritability by the taunts and questions of others, relapsing into reverie as soon as he has answered them. Shylock has caught Antonio on the hip, and here he is in the judgment-hall ready to feed fat his ancient grudge, scorning all proffers of money, impatient of all appeals to mercy, his whole being centred in the one fierce passion of hatred about to be satisfied; and in this state Macready represents him as self-occupied, gloomy, irritable! Of course, he has a *reason* for this interpretation; so careful a student of Shakespeare is not likely to have erred except upon consideration—though it is not unlikely that the desire to give a version of the part different from

Kean's may have influenced him; but upon what theory of human nature, upon what principles of Shakespearian criticism he was led to his interpretation, I confess myself unable to divine.

Macready's Shylock is an abject, sordid, irritable, argumentative Jew—not a haughty, passionate, and vindictive man whose vengeance is a retribution of wrongs to his sacred nation and to himself; and yet, although the devilish malignity has been suppressed, there is no restitution of the human affections in this Jewish bosom. Kean played Shylock as the personification of vindictiveness; yet in his ruthless bosom I always missed that affection for his child which even a malignant Jew must be supposed to have felt—in some degree, at least. But the absence in Macready's version is less excusable. Kean took what one may call the obvious view of Shylock, representing all that the plain *text* has given, and not troubling himself about anything lying *involved* in the text; hence, as Shakespeare gives no language of tenderness towards Jessica, Kean represents none. But Macready swerves from the obvious path—drops the ferocious malignity and lust for personal vengeance—yet never seems to have asked himself whether Shylock had the affections of his kind; accordingly, in the single scene with his daughter, he is harsh and irritable, when he might so truly and effectively have thrown in a touch of paternal tenderness. As I said before, we must not keep Shylock's humanity out of view.

Whatever he may be to his oppressors, the Christians, he is a man with a man's affections to his own tribe. He loves the memory of his lost Leah; he loves Jessica. Shakespeare has given the actor an exquisite passage wherein to indicate the husband's tenderness; and I believe that in the scene with Jessica an actor may effectively show paternal

tenderness. It is true the actor must *read into* the scene that which is not expressly indicated ; but precisely in such interpretations consists the actor's art. I have no hesitation in saying that to omit the paternal tenderness is to alter profoundly the tragic structure of the play ; for observe, if Shylock is a savage, blood-thirsty wretch, the whole moral is lost ; if his fierceness is *natural* to him, and not brought out by the wrongs of the Christians, all the noble philosophy of the piece is destroyed ; and the only way of showing that his fierceness is that of retaliation is to show how to others he is *not* fierce.

It may be objected that when Shylock discovers her flight he raves as much about his *ducats* as his *daughter*, which does not speak of great affection on his part. But I do not wish to paint him as an idolising father,—I wish merely to show that he is not without fatherly affection, and even fond fathers might very well utter such fearful imprecations as those which escape Shylock (“Would she were hearsed at my foot, the ducats in her coffin,” etc.) on discovering that their daughters had not only fled with lovers of a hated race, but added robbery to elopement. As a set-off against those angry words, read the sorrowful exclamation in the fourth act, “These be the *Christian* husbands ! I have a daughter : Would any of the stock of Barrabas Had been her husband, rather than a Christian !”

Further, the tragedy is heightened if we suppose Shylock to be fond of his child ; for then the rebellion of “his own flesh and blood” comes with a tenfold bitterness. To be sure, this makes Jessica more odious ; but she *is* odious ; and—I dare to say it—Shakespeare has committed a serious blunder in art by the mode in which he has represented Jessica, when he might easily have secured all he wanted by throwing more *truth* into the conception. That a Jewess

should love a Christian, for him forsake her home, and abjure her religion, is conceivable; but it was for the poet to show how the overmastering passion of *love* conquered all the obstacles, how love conquered religion and filial affection, and made her sacrifice *everything* to her passion. Instead of this, Shakespeare has made her a heartless, frivolous girl, who robs her father, throws away her mother's turquoise for a monkey, speaks of her father in a tone as shocking as it is gratuitous. Were a modern poet so to outrage nature and art, no mercy would be shown him. But I have little doubt that many readers are indignant at my temerity in accusing Shakespeare of such gross errors!

To return, however, to the principal point, I say if Shylock be not represented as having the feelings of our kind, *The Merchant of Venice* becomes a brutal melodrama, not a great tragedy. It is therefore imperative on the actor that he seize every possible occasion to indicate these feelings. No Shylock that I have seen does this; but Macready above all ought to have done so; because his Shylock is less demoniac than the others.

That there are some fine touches in his acting you will readily conceive. The bewilderment and rage of the great scene in the third act were admirable; still more so the look with which, on his final exit, he answers the taunts of Gratiano—first flashing out upon him as if about to turn against his persecutor, and then, overcome with a sense of his helplessness and ruin, sinking his sorrowing head upon his breast he totters off a broken man. Indeed, his whole demeanour during the trial scene—viewed according to *his* conception, which I have said seems to me profoundly erroneous—was that of a great actor. I have been thus minute in criticism because Shylock is a part he rarely plays; indeed I have never seen him play it before, though an old



playgoer; and it is for the interest of the drama that we should fully discuss the conceptions of great actors, especially when, as in Macready's case, they are great students of Shakespeare. In all that has been said here I have been simply opposing my individual impressions to what has obviously been the result of careful study on his part, and I assume no more authority for them than what they carry in themselves. I have given my reasons, it is for the reader to weigh them.

### THE DUCHESS OF MALFI.

*November 30, 1850.*

AMONG the pardonable errors of my youth, I count the belief that our old English dramatists were worthy of study as men of true dramatic genius. Pardonable, I say, because I was lured into it by a reverential regard felt for Lamb, Hazlitt, and others, as fine critics, and by the unmistakable beauties of the scenes and passages they quoted. My days and nights were given to Marlowe, Dekker, Webster, Marston, Kyd, Greene, Peele, and the illustrious obscure in Dodsley. Enthusiasm, however, was tamed by the irresistible mediocrity of these plays; no belief in their excellence could long stand up against the evidence of their dreariness and foolishness. I underlined fine passages; copied apophthegms and beauties into various note-books; wrote foolish articles in magazines expressive of my admiration: but the thing could not last, and I silently gave up my former idols to the scorn of whoso pleased to vilify them. Looking backwards to the days of Lamb—especially bearing in mind his peculiar idiosyncrasies—the admiration he felt, and tried to inspire others with, is per-



fectly intelligible; but, as I said some months ago in these columns, the resuscitation of those dramatists has been a fatal obstruction to the progress of the drama, and has misled many a brave and generous talent. It has fostered the tendency and flattered the weakness of poets, by encouraging them to believe that mere writing suffices for a drama—that imagery will supply the place of incidents, and that tragic *intentions* which boldly appeal to the imagination, are enough.

Nothing was needed to burst this bubble but the actual revival of a play or two upon the modern stage. Marston's *Malcontent* was rudely tried at the Olympic; and now *The Duchess of Malfi*, by John Webster, the most admired of the company excepting Marlowe, has been elaborately prepared by R. H. Horne,<sup>1</sup> and produced at Sadler's Wells<sup>2</sup> with all the care and picturesqueness for which that theatre is known. I have read that play four times, but although Horne has greatly lessened its absurdities, I never felt them so vividly until it was acted before my eyes. He has made it less tedious and less childish in its horrors, but the irredeemable mediocrity of its *dramatic* evolution of human passion is unmistakable. The noble lines of manly verse which charm the *reader* fail to arrest the *spectator*, who is alternating between impressions of the wearisome and the ludicrous.

Consider it under what aspect you will, short of a commonplace book of "passages," *The Duchess of Malfi* is a feeble and a foolish work. I say this fully aware of the authorities against me—fully aware of the "passages" which may be quoted as specimen-bricks. Other critics

<sup>1</sup> Richard Hengist [properly Henry] Horne (1803-1884), the author of *Orion*, the "farthing epic," and many other poetical works.

<sup>2</sup> November 20, 1850.

have declaimed against its accumulation of horrors; to my mind that is not the greatest defect. Instead of "holding the mirror up to nature," this drama holds the mirror up to Madame Tussaud's and emulates her "chamber of horrors"; but the "worst remains behind," and that is the motiveless and false exhibition of human nature. Take the story. The young Duchess of Malfi loves her steward, tells him so, and privately marries him. Her brothers Ferdinand and the Cardinal, caring only for the nobility of their lineage, wish to marry her to Prince Malatesta; and, on hearing how she has disgraced herself, resolve to kill her. But death, simply as death, is no fit punishment for such a crime. They prepare, therefore, a waxen image (anticipating Madame Tussaud) of Antonio, her husband, which is shown to her as his corpse; they fill her palace with mad people, whose howlings are to madden her; and, having wrought upon her till they think despair can hold out no longer, they bring in the executioners and strangle her. No sooner is she dead than Ferdinand, who planned it all, turns suddenly remorseful—as villains do in the last scenes of melodramas—and in the fifth act he goes raving mad. Now, firstly, the horrors are childish, because they grow out of no proper ground. They are not the culmination of tragic motives. The insulted pride of Ferdinand might demand as reparation the life of his sister, and there is a real tragic position in the third act, where he places the poinard in her hand and bids her die. But playing these fantastic tricks to bring her to despair is mere madness. How ludicrously absurd is this Ferdinand—who has never given a hint of any love for his sister, any sorrow for her shame, any reluctance in perpetrating these cruelties—to be suddenly lachrymose and repentant as soon as she is dead! This is not the work of a *dramatist*; it is

clumsy ignorance. *The Duchess of Malfi* is a nightmare, not a tragedy.

I might go through the work, and point out in almost every scene evidences of a similar incapacity for high dramatic art; but to what purpose? Every year plays are published by misguided young gentlemen exhibiting this kind of incapacity, and friendly critics have no greater compliment than to declare that the "mantle of the Elizabethan dramatists has fallen upon Mr. Jones." If Shakespeare is a great dramatist, Webster and company are not dramatists at all; and nothing exalts him more than to measure him by his contemporaries.

Despising probabilities, disregarding all conditions of art, and falsifying human nature, *The Duchess of Malfi* is, nevertheless, an attractive play to that audience. As a terrific melodrama, it delights the pit. It was, therefore, not a bad speculation to produce this adaptation, which, let me say once for all, must have cost Horne more labour than he will gain credit for. As a poet, Horne is known to wield "Marlowe's mighty line" like a kindred spirit. In these additions to Webster we defy the nicest critic to detect the old from the new; unless you have the two books side by side, you cannot tell whether you are reading Webster or Horne. But he would write a better play himself, and his labour would better be employed. Why waste his faculties in the hopeless task of making falsehood look like truth? *Cosmo de Medici*,<sup>1</sup> impracticable though it be, is worth any amount of Webster.

The acting of this play reflects credit on the theatre. Miss Glyn<sup>2</sup> was better than we have yet seen her; but this

<sup>1</sup> A tragedy by Horne published in 1837.

<sup>2</sup> Miss Isabella Glyn (Mrs. Dallas) was born in 1825, and died 1889. She was very successful on the stage in tragic characters, and, in later life, was eminent as a reader and lecturer.

intelligent actress will never achieve the position she aspires to, unless she make a radical change in her style, and throw aside the affectations and conventions she has acquired. Her elocution is vicious. She chaunts instead of speaking, and her chaunt is unmusical. Instead of taking the rhythm from the verse, the accent from the sense, she puts one monotonous rhythm upon the verse, and lets the accent obey the impetus of the chaunt, as if the voice mastered her, instead of her mastering the voice. Once or twice when she spoke naturally it was quite charming; and her grand burst of despair, in the fourth act, though injured by this very defect of chaunting, had so much force and fury in it that the house shook with plaudits. The comedy of the early scenes was hard, forced, and stagey. In making love to her steward she wanted tenderness, grace, and coyness. On the whole, however, one may say that, except Helen Faucit, no English actress could have played the part so well. Phelps<sup>1</sup> was ill at ease in the first four acts, as if the nonsense of his part baffled him, and he could not grasp it; towards the close of the fourth act, however, he made a clutch at it, and his madness in the fifth act was terribly real. George Bennett,<sup>2</sup> in *Bosola*, was suited to a nicety.

## THE PERFECTION OF ACTING.

*December 7, 1850.*

IF you desire to see really perfect acting, rush to the

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Phelps (1804-1878) was, during his career as manager, one of the mainstays of the legitimate drama. His management of Sadler's Wells Theatre, which he transformed from a booth into a temple of the drama, was one of the greatest achievements of the actor's skill. He was an admirable comedian as well as tragedian.

<sup>2</sup> George John Bennett (1800-1879), an excellent actor.

Lyceum and be astonished at *The Day of Reckoning*.<sup>1</sup> Astonishment elevates your eyebrows at the Lyceum venturing upon a French *drame* instead of its customary farces, comedies, and burlesques—a *drame*, too, prohibited in Paris because of its revolutionary tendency (poor Parisians!)—a *drame* presenting the ignoble scenes of the *tapis franc*—a burglary—attempted assassination—scoundrelism of various kinds—and, finally, a bloody duel, cutting short the existence of—Charles Mathews of all persons in the world!—a *drame* contrasting the *blouse* and the frock coat—the rich and the poor—the law's injustice and the villany of the great;—a *drame* which, in its original shape, *L'Enfant de Paris*, excited the invective of Jules Janin through twelve columns, to the virtuous indignation of its author, Emile Souvestre, who protested his *drame* was perfectly moral;—well, this *drame* you find altered from five acts to three, and otherwise improved by the accomplished Planché,<sup>2</sup> and presented to a thrilled Lyceum audience! Having recovered your astonishment at this venture and its perfect success—having been astonished at the *mise en scène* (but you are accustomed to that in this theatre)—the lasting astonishment is that Vestris<sup>3</sup> should perform a pathetic, noble woman, and perform it as no actress on our stage could do it! *That* is something to marvel at. Vestris, the greatest pet of the public, will startle even her greatest

<sup>1</sup> December 4, 1850.

<sup>2</sup> *The Day of Reckoning*, adapted by James Robinson Planché (1796-1880), the author and adapter of nearly two hundred plays, was played forty-four times in this season.

<sup>3</sup> Eliza Lucy Vestris (1797-1856), who married Charles Mathews in 1838, was one of the most fascinating of actresses. She shone chiefly in light comedy, comic opera, and extravaganza; so that her acting in this play was the more remarkable.



admirers in this part; for, assuredly, no one ever believed her powers lay at all in that direction. Yet I assure you her acting is quite a study. My readers have learned by this time that I am not a very great admirer of modern acting; and if, when I *do* admire, I express myself enthusiastically, yet I am not easily roused to enthusiasm; and I declare to them that the acting of Vestris and Charles Mathews in the new piece gave me more unmixed delight—more exquisite enjoyment—than I have for a long while received from the English stage. All the freshness of early enjoyment came back upon me, and no boy ever relished his first play more!

The secret of all this? Nothing can be simpler. Vestris and Charles Mathews<sup>1</sup> were *natural*—nothing more, nothing less. They were a lady and gentleman such as we meet with in drawing-rooms, graceful, quiet, well-bred, perfectly dressed, perfectly oblivious of the footlights. He is a polished villain—a D'Orsay without conscience, and without any of the scowlings, stampings, or intonations of the approved stage villain. There are scoundrels in high life—but they are perfectly well-bred. Whatever faults there may be in their conduct, their deportment is irreproachable. This is the villain represented by Charles Mathews—a man of fashion, reckless, extravagant, heartless, but perfectly unconscious of his being worse than his neighbours. Those who are familiar with his *Used up* will understand how he represents the quiet elegance of the part; but they must see him in this to appreciate his

<sup>1</sup> Charles James Mathews (1803-1878) was the son of a still more famous Charles Mathews. Educated as an architect, he made his first appearance on the stage in 1835, and acted until within a few days of his death. Along with Madame Vestris, he managed Covent Garden, 1839-42, and the Lyceum, 1847-54.



refined villany, cool self-possession, and gentlemanly devilishness. In every detail of his dress, in every gesture, and in every look, I recognised an artist representing Nature. It is, of course, a higher thing to play Othello or Macbeth, and I do not wish to exaggerate the importance of this part; but I say that in this part he plays *to perfection*: a Teniers may not be a Raphael, but it is worth a hundred ambitious attempts at Raphael.

This reliance upon Nature is what touches me so in Vestris. Her character is one which in most hands would become insipid or melodramatic: a sad, neglected wife, loving another man, of whom her husband is jealous, and solacing her unhappiness by constant beneficence to the poor—a noble, loving, suffering woman, she stands there represented with a truth, a grace, a gentle pathos I have no epithets to characterise. The sad dignity with which she bears her husband's insults, the terror which agitates her when that husband intimates his knowledge that her lover is in an adjoining room, and that he, the husband, is permitted by the law to kill him—these things are represented in a manner very unlike that current on the stage—and recall the finished art of French comedy. I am well aware that a little ranting and “letting down the back hair” would have “told” upon the audience with more noisy effect; but the difference is, that I carry away from the theatre an exquisite picture, on which it is delightful to dwell, which reflection tells me was perfect in its art; and if the audience did not shout hoarse bravos at the time, they felt it quite as vividly, and will go to see it again and again, certain of being charmed.

Oh, what a contrast between the natural manner of these two and the stage manner and stage life of all the rest! Yet the others *played* well too—notably Frank Matthews

(a real bit of character !), Roxby, and George Vining. But the contrast was between sunshine and the footlights—the ruddy cheek and the rouged cheek—the grace of a graceful woman and that of an opera dancer. I insist upon this point, for the public, the critics, and the actors may here read a valuable lesson as to what constitutes acting : a thing at present they seem to have the wildest notions of, and the ignorance of the public reacts upon the performer, forcing him often to disobey his own conceptions to gain their ignorant applause.

### WAS MACREADY A GREAT ACTOR ?

*February 8, 1851.*

THE greatest—incomparably so—of all living tragedians concluded his farewell performances at the Haymarket, on Monday last,<sup>1</sup> amidst the frantic bravos of a loving and regretting public. Although his farewell to the public will be bidden on the occasion of his benefit (fixed for the 26th instant), yet we may say that on Monday last he bade farewell to the stage. He has left it for ever. His career as an Actor is closed. We may select his niche in the Pantheon. The Actor is dead, and can no longer strut his brief hour on the stage. The curtain drops—the house empties—the lights are extinguished—silence, cold and cheerless, succeeds to the loud acclamations which made the vaulted roof reverberate erewhile—the Tragedian is washing the paint off his face, and in another hour will be in the retired privacy of his quiet happy home ! The mask is laid aside—and for ever.

Considering Macready, then, as dead—as I am bound to

<sup>1</sup> February 3, 1851. See Note, p. 112.

consider him in a theatrical sense—I will try to answer the question which my children and their friends are sure to ask me some day when I am running down *their* idolised tragedian, and try to spoil their pleasures by cheapening their “dear delightful Mr. —,” and assuring them I had seen “Edmund Kean and Macready in that part,”—the question, namely, “Was Macready a great Actor?” “*To say nothing but good of the dead,*” is a maxim for which I have always felt but a mediocre respect, mainly, perhaps, because the medal bears on the reverse side, “*To say nothing but evil of the living.*” While a statesman or an artist lives, envy and all uncharitableness assail him; no sooner does the bell toll for his funeral than those who yesterday were foremost to assail, now become elegiac in their grief and hyperbolic in their eulogium. It has always seemed to me that the contrary would be the more generous as well as the more advantageous method. When blame ceases to give pain I see no reason why it should be spared; when adverse criticism can “instruct the public” and yet not hurt an artist’s fortunes, then is the time for the critic to speak without reservation—*then* let us have the truth in all its energy!

Do not suppose this to be a preface to an “attack” upon the fine actor who has just quitted the scene. My purpose is far from polemical. I merely wish, in the way of conversation, to jot down such hints towards an appreciation of his talent as have occurred to me; and as, with all my admiration, I must still qualify the praise by advancing objections which thorough-going admirers will pronounce heresies, I claim, at the outset, the right of saying of the dead all the evil I think, and not of garlanding the tomb with artificial flowers.

It is a question often mooted in private, whether

Macready was a *great* actor, or only an intelligent actor, or (for this, too, is not unfrequently said) an intrinsically bad actor. The last opinion is uttered by some staunch admirers of Kemble and Young, and by those critics who, looking at the drama as an *imitation of Nature*, dwell upon the exaggerations and other false colours wherewith Macready paints, and proclaim him, consequently, a bad artist. Now, in discussing a subject like the present, it is imperative that we understand the *point of view* from which we both look at it.

I am impressed with the conviction that the majority mistakes Art for an *imitation* of Nature. It is no such thing. Art is *representation*. This is why too close an approach to Reality in Art is shocking; why coloured statues are less agreeable—except to the vulgarest minds—than the colourless marble.

Without pausing to expound that principle, I beg the reader will, for the present at least, take my word for its accuracy, that I may be able to place him at my point of view. Taking Art as a Representative rather than as an Imitative process (including imitation only as one of its *means* of representation), I say that the test of an actor's genius is not "fidelity to Nature," but simply and purely his power of exciting emotions in you respondent to the situation—ideal when that is ideal, passionate when that is passionate, familiar when that is familiar, prosaic when that is prosaic. A bad actor mouths familiar prose as if it were the loftiest verse; but a good actor (such as Bouffé or Charles Mathews), if he were to play ideal characters with the same familiarity and close adherence to Nature as that which makes his performance of familiar parts charming, would equally sin against the laws of Art.

Let me go some distance back for an illustration. In

Greek tragedy, acting, as we understand it, was impossible. Addressing an audience of thirty thousand (I give you the number on the authority of Plato), all of whom, like true democrats, insisted on hearing and seeing, the unassisted voice and the unaided proportions of the actor would of course have been useless. A contrivance considerably raised and amplified the man's stature, while his voice was assisted by a bronze mask with a round hole at the mouth, through which the actor spoke as through a speaking-trumpet. Now I ask you to place yourself upon stilts and shout "To be or not to be," through a speaking-trumpet, and *then* answer me whether acting were possible under *such* conditions!

This mask gives me the image I am in want of to convey my meaning. The Latin word *persona* is derived from thence, and *dramatis personæ* may be translated "*The masks through which the actors speak.*" Whether the actor dons a veritable mask of bronze; or whether he throws it aside and makes a mask of his own face, he is still only personating, *i.e.* speaking through a mask, *i.e.* representing. The Greeks had twenty-six different classes of masks, and bestowed immense pains on them. "There be actors that I have seen play, and heard some applaud too," who had but *one* invariable mask—and that a bad one—for every part. *Ma non ragioniam di lor!*

Taking, then, the masks as types of the various characters an actor has to play (to *personate*, as we correctly say), you see at once what a very different thing it was for the Greek actor to go to some antique Nathan and choose his mask, and for the modern who has to invent and make up his own mask with his own limited materials! Many actors, nay, the vast majority, do still go to some Nathan's and borrow a *traditional* mask; just as many poetasters go to the



common fund for images, similes, rhymes and rhythms, or as politicians re-issue the old and well-worn currency of sophisms, facts, and paralogisms. So few men can compose their own masks.

To compose a mask, or, if you like it, to personate a character, there are three fundamental requisite conditions, which I will call—1. *Conceptual Intelligence*; 2. *Representative Intelligence*; 3. *Physical Advantages*. The first condition is requisite to *understand* the character; the two last are requisite in different degrees to *represent* the character. High poetic culture, knowledge of human nature, sympathy with elemental states of passion, and all that we understand by a fine intellect, will assist the actor in his *study* of the character, but it will do no more. The finest intellect in the world would not enable a man to play Hamlet or Othello finely. Shakespeare himself couldn't do it; but wisely cast himself (Oh! the lesson to actor-managers!) as the Ghost. There are other requisites besides conception. There is the second requisite (what I have called representative intelligence), under which may be included the intelligent observation and reproduction of *typical* gestures, looks, tones—the mimetic power of imitating peculiarities. This requisite is possessed by actors oftener than the first. Without fine intellect it makes respectable actors; carried to a certain degree and accompanied with certain physical advantages it makes remarkable actors, especially in the comic line. The third requisite, which I have named physical advantages, includes person, deportment, voice, and physical power. Too little consideration is devoted to that, yet it is enough of itself to make or mar an actor. All the intellect in the world, all the representative intelligence in the world, could not enable a man with a weak voice, limited in its compass, unless compensated by some peculiar



effects in tone, to perform Othello, Macbeth, Shylock, etc., with success. Whereas a noble presence, a fine voice, and a moderate degree of representative intelligence, with no appreciable amount of conceptual intelligence, have sufficed to draw the town ere now, and make even critics believe a great actor has appeared.

Having thus briefly indicated what I conceive to be the leading principles in the philosophy of acting, I proceed to apply them to Macready; and first say that, inasmuch as he possesses in an unusual degree the three requisites laid down, he must be classed among the *great* actors. His conceptual intelligence every one will acknowledge. Even those to whom his peculiarities are offensive admit that he is a man of intellect, of culture. But I do not go along with those who exalt his intellect into greatness. I am not aware of any manifestation of greatness he has given. His conception always betrays care and thought, and never betrays foolishness. On the other hand, I never received any light from him to clear up an obscurity; my knowledge of Shakespeare is little increased by his performances. I cannot point to any one single trace of illumination—such as Edmund Kean used to flash out. This may be my fault; but I am here recording individual impressions, and I say that Macready's knowledge of Shakespeare and his art, unquestionable though it be, does not prove to me the greatness of intellect which his ardent admirers assume for him. The intelligence most shown by Macready is that which I have named representative intelligence, and which he possesses in a remarkable degree. Certain peculiarities and defects prevent his representing the high, heroic, passionate characters; but nothing can surpass his representation of some others; and connecting this representative intelligence with his physical advantages, we see

how he can execute what he conceives, and thus become an actor. His voice—one primary requisite of an actor—is a fine one, powerful, extensive in compass, and containing tones that thrill, and tones that weep. His person is good, and his face very expressive. So that give him a character within his proper range and he will be great in it; and even the greatest actors can only perform certain characters for which their representative intelligence and physical organisation fit them.

“I wish I had not seen Macready in *Macbeth*. I saw him in Werner, and came away with such an impression of his power that I regret having seen his *Macbeth*, which completely destroys my notion of him.” That was the phrase I heard the other day at dinner, and it seemed to me a good text for a criticism on Macready; for if the real test of an actor be that he raises emotions in you respondent to the situation, then assuredly does Macready stand this test whenever the situation be *not* of a grand, abstract, ideal nature. The anguish of a weak, timid, prostrate mind he can represent with a sorrowing pathos, as great as Kean in the heroic agony of Othello; and in all the touching *domesticities* of tragedy he is unrivalled. But he fails in the characters which demand impassioned grandeur, and a certain *largo* of execution. His *Macbeth* and *Othello* have fine touches, but they are essentially unheroic—their passion is fretful and irritable, instead of being broad, vehement, overwhelming. His *Hamlet* is too morbid, irritable, and lachrymose. Lear is his finest Shakespearian character—because the fretfulness and impatience of the old man come within the range of Macready’s representative powers, of which the terrible curse may be regarded as the climax. King John, Richard II., Iago, and Cassius are also splendid performances; in each of them we trace the

same characteristic appeal to the actor's peculiar powers. Although you can see him in no part without feeling that an artist is before you, yet if you think of him as a great actor, it is as Werner, Lear, Virginius, Richelieu, King John, Richard II., Iago—not as Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet, Coriolanus. Nor is this any ground of objection. Every actor is by nature fitted for certain characters, and unfitted for others. I believe Macready to be radically unfitted for ideal characters—for the display of broad elemental passions—for the representation of grandeur, moral or physical; and I believe him peculiarly fitted for the irritable, the tender, and the domestic; he can depict rage better than passion, anguish better than mental agony, misery better than despair, tenderness better than the abandonment of love. But the things he can do he does surpassingly well; and for this, also, I must call him a great actor.

The tricks and mannerisms which others copy, and which objectors suffer to outweigh all other qualities, I need waste no words on here. He was great in spite of them, as Kean was in spite of his.

Summing up these remarks into a compact sentence, I answer the question put by my imaginary questioners thus: "Yes, Macready *was* a great actor. Though not a man of genius, he was a man of intellect, of culture, of representative talent, with decided physical advantages, capable of depicting a wide range of unheroic characters with truth and power, an ornament to his profession, the pride of his friends, and the favourite of the public. He gained his position when Kean and Young were on the stage; when they left it he stood alone. His departure left a blank. There was no successor; none capable of bending the bow of Ulysses."

Before I conclude this incomplete notice let me, in

extenuation of what may seem severity, observe that I have throughout criticised according to an abstract standard of the Art, and not according to the present condition of the stage. I might easily and conscientiously have written a panegyric; but there would not have been half the real compliment in it there is in the foregoing attempt at philosophic analysis, though blame may have been "precipitated" by the analysis. True, very true, the adage, "Art is difficult, Criticism easy;" but there is something far easier than Criticism, and that is panegyric!

#### MRS. KEMBLE'S SHAKESPEARE READINGS.<sup>1</sup>

*March 29, 1851.*

SUCH an intellectual delight! To those who really love Shakespeare, and have any feeling for what is highest in dramatic art, there can be no performance half so fascinating as these readings. By means of changes of voice, unforced yet marked, and sufficient gesticulation to explain the text, aided by the fine commentary of eye and brow, Mrs. Kemble brings before you the whole scene, enacts every part, and moves you as the play itself would move you. One great charm in these Readings, and one which gives them such superiority over performances, is that all the minor parts assume their true position, and produce the harmony which the poet designed. Every one knows the exquisite beauty of some of these minor parts, and knows also the merciless massacre of them on the stage. But in these Readings the dreadful misapprehension of meaning

<sup>1</sup> Frances Anne Kemble, Mrs. Butler (1809-1893), at this time and for many years afterwards gave frequent dramatic readings at Willis's Rooms, the St. James's Theatre, and elsewhere.

and distortion of verse which understrappers inflict upon us are banished, and even the slightest parts are carefully given.

With regard to her reading of the greater characters some difference of opinion will naturally exist, but no one will deny that her reading is thoughtful and striking. The versatility displayed in her rendering of the saucy child York and the smooth hypocrisy of Richard in their colloquy was greatly applauded. I never enjoyed Shakespeare so much out of my own study. I have heard Tieck<sup>1</sup> read Shakespeare, and Seydelmann,<sup>2</sup> the great tragedian; but although the former is celebrated as the first of *readers*, and the latter was to my thinking one of the first of actors—although both of them *read* better than Mrs. Kemble in the strict sense of the word—yet for *dramatic* reading, that is to say, for giving you the effects of acting without the aids of the stage, I prefer Mrs. Kemble.

### SCHILLER'S ROBBERS.<sup>3</sup>

*April 26, 1851.*

"HAD I been the creator of this world," said a very German

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Tieck (1773-1853) during his long residence in Dresden "used to delight a select circle of men of letters, artists, and foreign visitors by his readings of the dramatic masterpieces of all ages. Those who enjoyed the privilege of admission to these literary evenings speak of his reading as of an intellectual delight, like that which Talma afforded to the connoisseurs of the Théâtre-Français."

<sup>2</sup> Karl S. Seydelmann (1793-1843) was one of the greatest German actors of his day, standing between, and equalling, Ludwig Devrient and Theodor Döring. He had few physical advantages, but studied and composed his characters laboriously, being especially a master of make-up. It was said of him that he "presented portraits rather than character-studies." Shylock was one of his great parts.

<sup>3</sup> "Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. On Easter Monday, April 21, 1851, will be presented by Her Majesty's Servants (for the first time in



Prince to Goethe, "and had foreseen that *The Robbers* would have been written, I would have left the world uncreated!"

"C'est dommage, Garo, que tu n'es point entré  
Aux conseils de celui que prêche ton curé :  
Tout aurait été mieux !"

What a charming universe we should have had with that Prince for our maker! But the Fates, you see, willed it otherwise: they made of that Prince no more than a German Transparency; and they permitted *The Robbers* to be written, to be acted, to be the scandal and delight of juvenile Europe, and to usher in one of the great poets of our times! Remorseless Fates!

Moralists gravely assure us that Schiller's play excited German youth to become robbers—especially one nobleman of fairest gifts, who disgraced his "*Adel*," and terminated an ancient lineage on the unromantic scaffold. Scholiasts, the ponderous blockheads, assure us that Olympiodorus drowned himself after reading Plato's *Phaedon*—in his eagerness to enjoy the immortality there so glowingly painted. So you see what "bad influence" even the best of books may have—on noodles or bad minds! To the pure all things are pure. And as to this "German nobleman," he turns out on investigation to be a German blackguard, whom debauchery and riotous extravagance had reduced to want; "who took London) Schiller's magnificent play of *The Robbers*, adapted to the English stage by Mr. James Anderson." A note on the playbill says: "This most extraordinary production abounds with passages of the most superior excellence, and exhibits situations the most powerfully interesting that can be figured by the imagination. It touches equally those great master-springs of Terror and of Pity. . . . This piece, so far from being hostile in its nature to the cause of virtue, is one of the most truly moral compositions that ever flowed from the pen of genius." It was acted eight times. See Note p. 79.



to the highway," says Carlyle, "when he could take to nothing else—not allured by an ebullient enthusiasm, or any heroical and misdirected appetite for sublime actions, but driven by the more palpable stimulus of importunate duns, an empty purse, and five craving senses."

What mischief *The Robbers* effected must be laid to the account of the age itself, with its deep disquiet, its revolutionary instincts, its volcanic vehemence against effete corrupt forms of social life. This daring play could only have been written by a boy of genius; a man of genius would have pruned the extravagances, and thereby have destroyed its effect. Less absurd, it would have been less successful, because less startling. For I must frankly confess that, with all my admiration for Schiller, directly I quit the *historical* for the *critical* point of view—directly I cease to regard it as a fiery product of a volcanic period, and view it purely as a work of art—it appears to me an intolerable absurdity, and mainly, perhaps, from the cause so candidly stated by Schiller himself: "I attempted to delineate men two years before I had seen one." Hence it is that character, motive, passion,—all that makes the substance of a dramatic work—are of all vague, false, rhetorical nature, which we see in the writings of boys (and most men never quit their teens in this respect). But this, which prevents *The Robbers* from ranking as a work of art, in no way interfered with its vehemence as an assault upon social conventions. Therefore its success was prodigious; Schiller soon learned to feel ashamed of his first-born, and nothing can be more unlike it than *Wallenstein* or *William Tell*.

As the author of *The Robbers*, Schiller is best known all over Europe, and Mr. Anderson has earned the thanks of the public in venturing to produce it. He so rarely gives

me an opportunity of praising him that I must seize this, and say that—in spite of the enormous mistakes he has made—in spite of the strangely naïve supposition that the public would go to see Shakespeare played by such a company! <sup>1</sup>—he deserves loud praise for the bold, and I fear unprofitable, production of *Fiesco* and *The Robbers*. It is an appeal to the cultivated classes; it enables them to see acted works which, however celebrated, there is little chance of their seeing on the stage; it is novelty, and of a high character. Now, although Mr. Anderson's management has assuredly not been distinguished by any prejudice in favour of "high art," and his playbills have "made the judicious grieve" by their deplorable want of taste, outbunning Bunn! <sup>2</sup>—nevertheless, I say that the production of

<sup>1</sup> *A Winter's Tale* had been played with Anderson as Leontes, Miss Vandenhoff as Hermione, S. A. Emery as Autolycus; *Hamlet* with Anderson as Hamlet, Mrs. Walter Lacy as Ophelia, Walter Lacy as Osric; *Henry IV.*, Part I., with Anderson as the Prince, Vandenhoff as Hotspur, and a Mr. Barratt as Falstaff; *Coriolanus* with Anderson as Caius Marcius; *As You Like It* with Mrs. Nisbett as Rosalind, Emery as Touchstone, and Vandenhoff as Jacques; *Othello* with Anderson as Othello, Vandenhoff as Iago. For the rest, the company consisted of such undistinguished performers as Cooper, Cathcart, W. West, Mrs. Ternan, and Miss F. Vining. This Emery is not, of course, to be confounded with his father, John Emery, the great Tyke and Caliban.

<sup>2</sup> On January 16th was produced a new comedy, entitled, *The Old Love and the New*, by Robert Sullivan, Esq. The playbill of February 3rd bore the following announcement:—

"~~AND~~ BRILLIANT, TRIUMPHANT,

AND LEGITIMATE SUCCESS,

OF TRUE ENGLISH COMEDY!!!

The ORIGINAL COMEDY, entitled, The

OLD LOVE AND THE NEW.

Having received the unanimous approval of overflowing and delighted

these two works by a foreign great poet ought to be credited to his account as important items. It shows a literary ambition; a desire to please the cultivated. Had he shown more of it—had he imitated Macready in winning public gratitude—I dare say his money losses would have been as great as they are, but his professional gain would have more than compensated it.

To return to *The Robbers*. I saw it played many years ago in Munich, with Laroche and Eslair—one of the old Weimar actors trained by Goethe and Schiller. I cannot say that it moved or amused me. The defects, which are glaring enough in reading, are brought into terrible prominence by acting; and what is melodramatic in it has been so much better done in hundreds of melodramas that beyond the mere curiosity to see a celebrated work, I really found little entertainment in it. When Anderson announced it at Drury Lane, while applauding his spirit and taste in venturing on this kind of novelty, I was dubious as to the ultimate success. It might succeed certainly; for nothing is so capricious as the public. If it did, so much the better; the adventurous spirit would be fostered; and if it did *not*, there was great chance of faith in good works disappearing, and the old managerial routine resuming its ruinous obstinacy.

Audiences, and been pronounced the most charming Comedy of modern times, WILL BE REPEATED EVERY EVENING."

It was, for a week, and then dropped out of the bills almost entirely. The bill for Saturday, February 22nd, opened thus:—

"*Never*, within the walls of Drury Lane Theatre, was there witnessed such a perfect Scene of Enthusiasm, from the rise to the fall of the curtain, as last night to the New Gorgeous Operatic Spectacle of *Azaël, the Prodigal*" (an adaptation of *L'Enfant Prodigue*, by Scribe and Auber, which was, as a matter of fact, repeated eighty-three times, right up to the end of the season). These are fair specimens of the puffing to which Lewes objected.

"How then *did* the play go off?" My dear Madam, I have to ask the *same* question, for I was not there. "Not there! You, a critic!" I comprehend your astonishment, but precisely because I am a critic, and do not judge of pieces I have not seen, I am forced to defer giving an opinion on this and all the Easter pieces until I return—next week. *Que voulez-vous?* I often complain of deficient ubiquity, and you yourself must see the impossibility of my being *here* among the buds, *and there* in the gaseous atmosphere of theatres. I am taking a holiday! I could tell you immense lies, but the innocence around me gives me a pastoral turn of mind, and forces me to candour. "What does he in the North, when he should serve his *Leader* in the West?" *What* does he? Why, enjoy this park, these wooded heights, this winding stream (the fish by the way avoid me—they must know I'm a critic!), smile affably on obsequious vassals who fly at my command, as if I were a magnate of the land instead of being simply one of the Aristocracy of Intellect (poor devil!). I lounge, play billiards, ramble among the primroses, with an eye to every "neat-handed Phillis" that comes in my way (and *such* hands they have, these Phillises!), and altogether demean myself "like that most capricious poet, Honest Ovid, among the Goths," to use Touchstone's simile. The weather is brilliant; the estate is lovely; and my host affable (something too eloquent, perhaps, on *draining*; but let that pass!). There you have a veracious account of "Vivian among the Buds"—instead of Vivian in the Boxes. He thus recovers his failing health—lost, dear Madam, in *your* service, and in the service of all the charming and charmed readers of this Portfolio<sup>1</sup> of our journal.

<sup>1</sup> The theatrical criticisms of the *Leader* generally appeared under the heading of "The Arts," not "Portfolio."

## SCRIBE'S COMEDIES.

May 17, 1851.

THE production at the St. James's Theatre of Scribe's amusing comedies, *La Camaraderie* and *Une Chaîne*,<sup>1</sup> I look upon as affording useful lessons to those of our dramatists who may be wise and modest enough to profit by them. It is certainly a subject to excite surprise that we, with so glorious a literature, with so much dramatic ambition, should, nevertheless, be so deplorably deficient in excellent comedies.

Our dramatists have a notion that Wit is the primary quality, at once the base and pediment of a Comedy. It may be a paradox, but it is not the less a truth, that so far from Wit being the primary requisite, a Comedy may be lighted up with Wit and yet be wearisome, while on the other hand, the dialogue may move amidst mere mediocrities, rising occasionally into humour, and the Comedy, nevertheless, be sparkling, animated, amusing. Take your subject out of Life, as we all know it, take your characters from reality, construct your story with the severity demanded by dramatic art, and you may fairly dispense with wit; I do not say that wit—if you have it—will not be a charm the more, but I say that it is an exquisite superfluity: it is at the best, no more than the flying buttress to the building.

The French writers, at any rate, have always bestowed their labour upon the perfection of the construction and the

<sup>1</sup> *La Camaraderie* was produced at the Théâtre-Français, January 19, 1837; *Une Chaîne* at the same theatre, November 29, 1841. They were performed at the St. James's, respectively, on May 9 and May 12, 1851. Mr. Sydney Grundy's clever one-act play, *In Honour Bound*, is suggested by *Une Chaîne*.



representation of character rather than upon witty dialogue; perhaps because wit is so abundant in France. The result is appreciable whenever we see their comedies. Our dramatists, on the contrary (with the single exception of Bulwer, who fortunately cannot be witty, and, therefore, is forced to throw his strength elsewhere), have the Congreve model before them, and are nothing if not epigrammatic: any materials, however carelessly gathered, are thought good enough, so that the "jokes" be abundant. Constructing a story as the development of some idea—grouping around that the characters which will most clearly set it forth—and subordinating the *writer* to the *dramatist*—these are processes which, however necessary, our dramatists disdain or overlook.

But I need not lecture. Scribe's two comedies are there to prove the force of what I can but vaguely intimate. What gaiety, what comedy there is in *La Camaraderie*, and how little wit! Is not the subject one taken from the breathing realities around us? Do we not all recognise the wholesome satire of *cliquishness*, and recognise, moreover, how Scribe has arranged all his lights so that their rays converge towards his central purpose—how, in short, he has worked up a mere "notion" into a work of "art." *Une Chainé*, though less gay, trenching, indeed, upon the painful, but never overstepping the boundaries of comedy—is also a study of construction. How admirable the idea! A young composer has formed a liaison with a great lady. She "pushes" him in "the world." She fosters his reputation. Happy man! lucky dog! A countess at his feet—"the world" attentive to him—love and glory mingling in one! So thinks many a "neglected genius" who would fain be "recognised." There cannot be a greater mistake. As to reputation I will say nothing for the present, I have



only to direct your attention to the point illustrated by the dramatist, viz., the destruction of that young man's happiness by this very liaison. A chain is round his neck; no matter if it be golden, you cannot gild the slavery; this countess who has made his reputation will not hear of his marriage—he loves his young and pretty cousin, rich and loving,—but there is a chain round his neck! The exhibition of that social position, its dangers and inconveniences, Scribe has given in *Une Chaîne*; and whoever wishes to see the economy of means in the production of effect should analyse this piece.

Take away Régnier<sup>1</sup> and Lafont,<sup>2</sup> and the piece was indifferently acted. M. Francisque, who has the grotesque pretension of playing the lovers, is absolutely intolerable—bad as our stage is in that department, we can show nothing so bad. But Régnier and Lafont cover a multitude of sins. The gaiety, *verve*, nature, and intelligence of Régnier, and the gentlemanly ease and quiet of Lafont, we shall seek in vain for on our own stage. This is, unhappily, Régnier's last week! Ravel, we hope to shout at soon; and for Rachel we have only a fortnight to wait! One fortnight! “Gallop apace, ye fiery-footed steeds.”

<sup>1</sup> François-Joseph-Pierre Régnier de la Brière (1807-1885) entered the Théâtre-Français in 1831 and retired in 1872. He occupied a position something like that of his pupil M. Coquelin the elder, in our own time. He shone in the Figaros and Scapins of classic comedy and in the leading characters of Scribe, Augier, Sandeau, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Pierre-Chéri Lafont (1801-1873), a very famous *grand jeune premier*. He created La Rivonnière in Dumas' *Père Prodigue*, Feuillet's Montjoye, Mortemer in Sardou's *Vieux Garçons*, and many other important parts.

MLLE. DE BELLE-ISLE.<sup>1</sup>

June 21, 1851.

THE production of *Mlle. de Belle-Isle* at the St. James's Theatre has given every one the opportunity of ascertaining the superior style in which it is put on the stage and performed at the Princess's (Rachel, of course, excepted), and the increased interest which Mr. Slous, the adapter, has given to the piece by deepening its *drame*; the comedy has evaporated in translation, but the serious interest has been considerably heightened. Then as to the acting, no one would think of comparing M. Raphael<sup>2</sup> with Charles Kean, nor M. Chotel with Wigan; if Mlle. Avenel is a trifle better than Mrs. Winstanley, she is still far from tolerable. On the French, as on the English stage, I miss the elegance and *parfum de bonne société*, which the subject imperatively demands, in order that vice, in losing all its grossness, should lose half its deformity.

Rachel I except. The high-bred elegance of her manner is as remarkable as the finesse and truth of her emotion; and I will take advantage of the occasion to say a few words on *The Natural in acting*, of which her performance was an example.

<sup>1</sup> Rachel appeared on June 2, in *Phèdre*. She played the usual parts of her repertory—Camille, Roxane, Adrienne Lecouvreur, etc., and appeared in *Mlle. de Belle-Isle* on June 14. This comedy, by the elder Dumas, was produced in 1837. It was adapted by A. R. Slous, and produced at the Princess's Theatre, June 4, 1851, under the title of *The Duke's Wager*; but this does not appear to have been the first English adaptation. Sarah Bernhardt made her début at the Théâtre-Français as Mlle. de Belle-Isle.

<sup>2</sup> Rachel's brother.

To play a part naturally you must not drag it down to *your* nature, but project yourself into the nature of the character represented. You do not portray nature by laying aside the mask, and allowing the audience to see your commonplace features; but by selecting the mask which represents the character. The nature of Macbeth is not to be represented by the nature of Mr. Smith. A woman may wring her hands and redden her nose with grief, which would be *natural* enough in the back kitchen; but this nature cannot be accepted as the expression of Cordelia's agony. In Art we must never forget the Beautiful, unless when striving after the Grotesque; and grief—or any emotion in acting—which copies too servilely the grimaces of vulgar nature, should be avoided by all serious artists. You speak in rhythm, you must temper even gestures with a certain artificial grace. The Roman Gladiator died in a picturesque and graceful attitude to the applause of the Amphitheatre: what he did in terrible earnest, you must imitate in earnest art. Indeed, the proposition is self-evident, that “to represent a character naturally” means to represent it according to its nature, not according to your own. Bouffé<sup>1</sup> and Charles Mathews, amidst all their amazing varieties of character, are always natural; Kean was natural in Shylock, Othello, Sir Giles; Macready was natural in Werner; Grisi is natural in Norma; Viardot in Fides; Ronconi in the Podestà. That is to say, each selects a mask more or less typical of the character to be represented; and having selected it, does not once let it fall.

Applying these general principles to Rachel, I say that anything more exquisitely natural than her Mlle. de Belle-

<sup>1</sup> Marie Bouffé (1800-1888), a celebrated comedian of the Boulevard theatres, who excelled in characters of mingled humour and pathos.

Isle cannot be named. The young naïve provincial it was not in her power to represent; her physique forbade it, no less than the attitude of her mind. But she was the young, simple, high-bred lady, to whom sorrow had given a gravity tempering the buoyancy of youth—who, bred up in the country, was perfectly innocent of all the intrigues of court, but was, nevertheless, a high-born woman with all the elegance and refinement of her caste. This gave an exquisite charm to her first scene, as, indeed, to the whole performance, and rendered peculiarly effective that scene with the Duc de Richelieu, in which, overcome by his apparent effrontery in asserting that he was the night before in her room, she exclaims, *Vous mentez!* Here Mr. Slous has committed an unpardonable translation; for he has coarsened *Vous mentez* into “Thou liest.” I beg to assure him that *Vous mentez* has no such use in French; and that when Mrs. Kean uttered the words I felt my flesh creep, and was literally “shocked” to hear a young, high-bred lady make so outrageous a speech. The quiet, haughty indignation of Rachel’s *Vous mentez* was marvellous: it did not draw forth a storm of applause, so that an English actor (testing everything by that fallacious standard!) might regret she did not make a “point” of it. But whoever has seen Rachel must know how easy it is for her to make a “point” if she choose; and must see that her not doing so was in obedience to her high artistic taste. Of the whole part I may say that it affords little scope for great effects, and some of the Rachel admirers were disappointed in it; but, for myself, I think it as rare a piece of art as can be seen, and I prefer it to Adrienne Lecouvreur with its great “effects.” Such dignity, such grace, such tenderness, one does not often see anywhere. The whole of that interview with her lover, where he taxes her with infamy and gives her the Duc’s letter, was

as fine, in its way, as the fourth act of *Camille*. Her reading the letter,—the bewildered expressions flitting across her face, like cloud-shadows over a meadow land,—the struggling of her mind to apprehend the meaning,—and the dignified touching pain with which she met that meaning when it rose into her mind,—were such as only a *great* actress could have rendered. And then how subtle, and how true her manner of saying, "*Ah ! que je suis heureuse !*" when all is explained, and her lover once more is circled in her loving arms. Instead of being joyful at the words, "Ah ! how happy I feel !" she drew the back of her hand across her forehead, and, with drooping eyes and faltering voice, expressed that joy itself was a sort of pain in its intensity—which we all know to be the effect of sudden joy.

It is impossible for me to describe the delight with which this performance filled me. The little nothings were made exquisite by manner. Her very curtsy was an effect. The simplest speeches acquired a significance which was surprising ; and if any interest could have been excited by the play itself, or by the other actors, I should have set Saturday evening last among my Calendar of Enjoyments.

One pleasant thing about the St. James's Theatre is the absence of claqueurs ; and I mention it, because at the Opera and at our own theatres, I am sorry to see a growing tendency in the direction of claque, which promises to make it as great a nuisance as in France. In Berlin, the Government has interdicted all sounds of approbation or disapprobation in the theatre ; but that has been done from *political* rather than *artistic* motives, and must materially diminish the enjoyment of the audience, to say nothing of the actors. I would rather have a bawling claque with its beery enthusiasm, than not be allowed to shout my own approval at a touch of art. Yet, why is this expression of



emotion so necessary to us? We do not applaud in churches, be the preacher never so eloquent. That is, we do not *now* applaud; in Jeremy Taylor's time applause and hisses were as common in the church as in the theatre—*mais nous avons changé tout cela*. Now we sit quiet in pews and noisy in our boxes. Applause stimulates the actor, and relieves the oppressed bosoms of the audience; but you can always distinguish genuine applause from the claque, so that this latter is but a paltry invention after all! Paltry as it is, it has its history. The Greeks had their σοφοκλαῖς, or paid eulogists, as Pliny the Younger informs us, when speaking of the *Laudicæni* in Rome; and, indeed, it was but just that if the Poet or Orator remorselessly insisted on reading you his productions, he should at least recompense your half-stifled yawn and energetic bravo with a supper, or a present of some kind. A terrible and remorseless race the Poets! As Piron says, you cannot escape the Poet:—

“Du torrent de ses vers sans cesse il vous inonde.  
 Tout le premier lui-même il en raille, il en rit.  
 Grimace ! l'auteur perce.” . . .<sup>1</sup>

Such being his malady, the last set-off he could make was a decent supper. But, nowadays, the claque is hired in a more systematic manner; opera boxes have replaced suppers; “orders” purchase the “sweet voices”!

## NOT SO BAD AS WE SEEM.<sup>2</sup>

June 21, 1851.

You never read Petronius Arbiter, of course: he is too

<sup>1</sup> *La Métromanie* (1738), Act I., Scene 3.

<sup>2</sup> This comedy, specially written for amateur performances in aid of the projected “Guild of Literature and Art,” was first performed before the Queen and Prince Albert, at Devonshire House, May 27,



improper! I have. But to the pure all things are pure! This, however, I will say, that although scholars may prize the *Satyricon* for its pictures of Roman life and its occasional glimpses of elegance and poetry, the careful parent will *not* place it in the hands of his daughters. Among the few things I noted in that chaos of pruriency was one passage about the poverty of authors, where our ill-clad poet proudly drapes himself in his rags, and answering the question of wherefore he is so ill-clad, replies with a dignified sadness—Because the love of letters never yet made men wealthy. *Quare ergo, inquam, tam male vestitus es? Propter hoc ipsum, ait; Amor ingenii neminem unquam divitem fecit.* That has been true of all times, and is likely to continue so; but if we cannot keep authors from being poor, cannot we do something towards making them more *provident*. Such is the thought at the bottom of the scheme for a *Guild of Literature and Art*; and although doctors may differ as to the details of the scheme itself, there will, I suppose, be but one sentiment with respect to the original intention and the generosity of its promoters.

A crowded audience at the Hanover Square Rooms, on Wednesday, assembled to see the amateurs in their new play; unfortunately there were but few who could sit or see

1851, with the following cast:—The Duke of Middlesex, Frank Stone; the Earl of Loftus, Dudley Costello; Lord Wilmot, Charles Dickens; Mr. Shadowly Softhead, Douglas Jerrold; Mr. Hardman, John Forster; Sir Geoffrey Thornside, Mark Lemon; Mr. Goodenough Easy, F. W. Topham; Lord Le Trimmer, Peter Cunningham; Sir Thomas Timid, Westland Marston; Colonel Flint, R. H. Horne; Mr. Jacob Tonson, Charles Knight; Smart, Wilkie Collins; Hodge, John Tenniel; Paddy O'Sullivan, Robert Bell; Mr. David Fallen, Augustus Egg; Lucy, Mrs. Compton; Barbara, Miss Ellen Chaplin. It was afterwards produced at the Hanover Square Rooms (June 18), and frequently repeated both there and in the provinces.

comfortably, owing to the cramped space, and the platform not being raised. This may have had something to do with the effect of weariness which attended the performance; but the great fault was in the comedy itself. It may seem indelicate to criticise too closely a play written for such an object and under such circumstances; indeed, were the author less able to afford objection than Sir Edward Lytton, I should not whisper it; but he has been too successful not to perceive himself that the present comedy is too slow in its movement, and too hazy in its plot; nor will I pay him the bad compliment of saying it is to be reckoned among his successes—except for an occasional touch, and for the spirit which prompted him in writing it. Curiously enough, too, the amateurs are for the most part less admirable in these characters written for them than in those written two centuries ago! The reader has not now to be told what excellent actors some of these amateurs are, nor how charming the effect is of a play performed by men of education and refinement, so that even the insignificant parts have a certain *cachet d'élégance*; but to those who have seen these actors in *Not so Bad as We Seem*, for the first time, it is but just to say that no adequate idea of their powers can be formed. Frank Stone, indeed, is richer in the Duke of Middlesex than in any part he has yet attempted; but Dickens, except in the personation of Curl, where he gave a glimpse of his humour, and Lemon, and Forster, and Jerrold, and Costello, and Topham, and Egg, were incomparably better in *Every Man in his Humour*, or *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.<sup>1</sup> I do not think a company of actors

<sup>1</sup> *Every Man in his Humour* was performed at Manchester and Liverpool on July 26 and 28, 1847, for the benefit of Leigh Hunt and John Poole, Dickens playing Bobadil; Forster, Kitely; and Lewes, Old Knowell. Leech and Cruickshank, Jerrold and Lemon were also in the

could be now found to play *these* pieces with greater charm of ensemble.

I am told that the farce *Mr. Nightingale's Diary* is a scream, and that therein Dickens and Lemon show what they are capable of; but I was forced to leave after the comedy, having "to fry some *feesh*," as a German lady of my acquaintance used to say.

It is a pleasant sight to see these authors and artists assembled together in such a cause; and the buzz of friendly curiosity, as each new actor comes upon the stage, keeps the audience on the alert. The scene in Will's Coffee-house, for example, allowed the public to see their benefactor, Charles Knight, as Tonson, the celebrated bookseller; and Peter Cunningham bodily present in a scene he inhabits mentally; and Horne as the terrible Colonel (a capital bit of acting, by the way!), and Marston, whose Sir Thomas Timid was a bit of nature.

The stage is extremely pretty, and the scenery, dresses, and general getting up, betray the vigilance and taste of artists. The figures all looked like portraits. Forster seemed as if he had just the instant before jostled Walpole; Lemon reminded me forcibly of Dr. Johnson; and Egg looked quite grand as the poor proud author.

## ART OR AMUSEMENT?

June 28, 1851.

THERE was something of a mournful feeling rising in my mind as I sat out *Andromaque* the other night, and began cast. *The Merry Wives* was performed nine times in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow, between April 15 and July 20, 1848, for the benefit of Sheridan Knowles. Mark Lemon played Falstaff; Forster, Ford; and Dickens, Shallow.

to see that my admiration for the French Classic Drama was, to a certain extent, an anachronism. Yes, I freely admit that this is a form of art which has passed away; and those who scornfully condemn it are not so deplorably wrong as I used to fancy! It is I who have been wrong. I am not of my time; they are. This confession may be accepted as the *amende honorable*, but must not be interpreted as a retraction of opinion. That which I have for many years studied with delight, and always thought exquisite as Art, is not dashed from its pedestal because I now perceive the "time is out of joint."

The secret of the whole quarrel between the Classic and Romantic schools—between High Art and the Fast Critics—became suddenly revealed to me as I sat, warm and wearied, witnessing the performance of *Andromaque*. I could not but confess that the audience was anything but amused. I myself was not amused. Yet at the theatre one seeks *amusement* above all things. Whereupon it flashed across my mind that, from the time when the Drama ceased to claim for itself the exalted aims of Art, and chose the lower aim of Amusement, the real greatness of the stage began to decline. I do not believe that Æschylus, when he transfixed Prometheus to the Caucasus, or brought the Eumenides upon the shuddering scene, thought much of Amusement; nor did Sophocles, when he told the terrible Labdacidan legend, or depicted the madness of Ajax and the sufferings of Philoctetes. Theirs was a solemn office; poetry to them was something deeper than the casual flattery of an indolent soul. They worked *through* Amusement up to Art, they did not work *to* Amusement as to a worthy aim and end.

To a less extent this may be said also of Racine, Corneille, Molière, Shakespeare, Jonson, Goethe, and Schiller. By

them the Drama was regarded as an Art. The sources of Amusement were employed only as means to elevate the spectator's soul up to the poet's region—to arrest the wandering attention, and fix it on great ideas. Gradually what was Secondary has risen to be a Primary, the means have displaced the end, Amusement has usurped the throne of Art—all the attractions of decoration, scenic pomp, and stirring events, are sought, because they are “amusing,” and the *material* stifles the *spiritual*. Instead of asking, “Does the new drama brighten majestic truths in the steady light of noble poetry? does it exhibit character and elemental passions?” People ask, “Is it splendidly ‘got up’? are its ‘situations’ striking?”

This is not a criticism; but a statement. I do not here inquire whether such a condition be or be not defensible; I simply state what the condition is. Right understanding of what is expected may save writers and managers from confusion and ruin. If the public demands Amusement (as unquestionably it does), let the means of amusement be studied. If the public demands Art—which may be questioned—let Art be given. But to hamper Amusement with the necessary conditions of Art, or to degrade Art by making it secondary to Amusement, is not wise.

In the days of Racine, the audiences were delighted with beautiful verses, and cared more for the rigorous fulfilment of certain critical conditions than for “getting up,” or exciting “situations.” The audiences were composed of critics. They demanded an artistic enjoyment. The glitter of processions, the clash of swords, the tumult of orchestras, the splendour of dresses, the movement, noise, screams, and “grand effects” which dazzle and confuse us, were unknown to them; in the silence of admiration they listened to the cadence of a verse, tasted the delicacy of an expres-



sion, and pondered on the subtlety of a thought. They left the theatre, not, as we do, with aching heads and confused judgments, but with expanding minds, touched to fine issues by the magic of Art; they dwelt upon the Characters, the Passions, the Poetry, and the skill by which the poet had effected his object within the conditions of his Art. Nor is this less true of Shakespeare's audiences. We have a national idolatry for Shakespeare; yet our fanaticism will not enable us to sit out the majority of his plays; and of the few that *are* performed how much poetry is forced to be omitted!—how many scenes are wearisome! *We* cannot sit in a theatre listening to poetry; no, not even to the poetry of our greatest! We have been accustomed to amusement so long, that quiet dialogue is unable to keep us awake!

Goethe in his Theatre Prologue to *Faust* has imagined this struggle of Amusement and Art. The Poet thinking only of his lofty aims; the Manager thinking only of his "crowded houses." The Public, says the Manager, must have plenty to look at—

"Man kommt zu schaun, man will am liebsten sehen."

And if they are not accustomed to see much that is good, they are, nevertheless, plaguily well read.

"Zwar sind sie an das Beste nicht gewöhnt,  
Allein sie haben schrecklich viel gelesen!"

which makes it difficult to satisfy them. Even Shakespeare, you see, is tedious to them at times!

When I consider the Drama as Art, Racine appears to me a consummate artist, and his plays afford me exquisite delight; but if I am forced to consider it as an Amusement, then the Fast Critics appear to me to have truth on their



side in their unsparing condemnation. Scribe is more amusing than Molière; Dumas is more amusing than Racine; the *Green Bushes* is more amusing than *Antigone*; Madame Tussaud's more amusing than the Vatican.

Not only have the tastes of audiences changed, but the actors themselves have lost their traditions. Æschylus and Sophocles drilled their own actors; Molière and Shakespeare were managers. When acting was an Art the public was a Critic. Every fault of pronunciation or of gesture was visited with open disapprobation. Who criticises now? Who cares? Do not "eminent tragedians" make one doubt whether they understand the sense of the words they utter—

"And mouth the verses as curs mouth a bone"?

Who takes them to task? Criticism is insult!

In defence of Racine, and in explanation of the weariness which accompanies the performance of his plays, I would beg to remind you that ideal works demand ideal treatment. If Racine be played in a style of stilted vaudeville, he must be wearisome. But let an actor of genius appear, and what effects he will produce with those "frigid dramas"! Think of Clairon, Talma, Duchesnois, Rachel! It is a current fallacy that the effect Rachel produces is owing solely to her genius. But how is it that she cannot produce these effects in modern plays? She has had parts written for her—she has performed Lebrun, Hugo, Dumas, Soumet, Latour de Saint-Ybars, and Scribe<sup>1</sup>—and in each play has shown herself an incomparable actress; but, after all, the

<sup>1</sup> Rachel played Lebrun's *Marie Stuart* (see p. 99), Tisbé in Hugo's *Angelo*, Dumas' *Mlle. de Belle-Isle* (p. 144), Soumet's *Jeanne Darc*, Saint-Ybars's *Virginie*, and Scribe's *Adrienne Lecouvreur* and *La Czarine*.

effect is as nothing compared with her performance of Corneille and Racine! Explain that.

Not Rachel but Racine! And yet who disputes my admiration of Rachel? I think her the greatest actress I ever saw, and think that she is worthy to play Racine; but knowing the tragedies, I still feel that in some respects she falls short of her parts, and I feel moreover that could these tragedies be played by three or four great actors, the public would cease to cant about their frigidity. Andromaque is nearly as fine a character as Hermione; Oreste was one of Talma's triumphs; but we who only see Hermione, how can we pretend to judge of the play?

Hermione is one of the parts in which Rachel is transcendent; but on Friday last, although some of the earlier scenes were given with a delicacy and ideality perfectly enchanting, the terrific burst of the last act—

“ Ah ! fallait il croire une amante insensée ”—

was wanting in the truth and power with which she usually plays it. Several of the readings were new to me, and far from satisfactory. Her greatest scene was that with Andromaque; and there I would call attention to the grace and dignity with which she covered the bitter scorn that came withering from her hate; it was the scorn of a woman, but that woman was a princess!

## VALÉRIA.

July 12, 1851.

THE long-expected *Valéria*<sup>1</sup> was produced on Wednesday,

<sup>1</sup> Drama in five acts and in verse, by Jules Lacroix, the translator of the *Œdipus Rex* and *King Lear*, and A. Maquet, the collaborator of Dumas *père*, produced at the Théâtre-Français, February 28, 1851.

and achieved a noisy success. Clever the play undoubtedly is, full of "incident" and "situation," abounding in those attractive, but essentially vulgar, qualities—mystery and surprise, and affording the great tragedian an opportunity of displaying her versatility. But to confess the truth, I found it an ignoble spectacle. As a drama there was something painful to me in seeing the old routine of the Dumas-Maquet school thrown back into Rome of the Cæsars; and the second act, with its double action going on in two different parts of the stage, reminded me too forcibly of Jonathan Bradford or the Murder at the Roadside Inn! Say what you will, there is a necessary "keeping" in all styles.

"Le style le moins noble a pourtant sa noblesse," but the Fast School in a toga does not impress me favourably. As a cleverly complicated intrigue, *Valéria* is worthy of the collaborateur of Dumas; but this application of the principles of *Le Théâtre Historique* to Roman life is to me revolting. How I longed for the austere simplicity of Racine, trusting more to lovely verses than to startling surprises, caring more for the *emotions* of his audience than for their *sensations*, and respecting Rome as a city not to be profaned by the intrusion of the barbarians! In this *Valéria* the authors have undertaken to paint the frivolity, stupidity, and pedantry of Claudius, and something of the corrupt condition of Rome. Tacitus and Juvenal have made this epoch eternally odious—they have pitilessly exposed the horrors of that age—but it remained for MM. Lacroix and Maquet to make it thoroughly vulgar and ignoble.

Nor is that all. It being a tendency of the age to find materials for Art in any cloaca, as it is to find pathos in infirmities fitter for the hospital, the authors may be excused their picture of imperial Rome, as a farce to please the

"groundlings" (pretty subject for a farce!), but nothing can excuse such stupid violation of history as their deliberate attempt to rehabilitate Messalina. The force of paradox can no farther go. I am willing to believe that Messalina was calumniated, and that Agrippina set much of the scandal on foot—for the same reasons as we know that Egalité slandered Marie Antoinette. I am pretty sure that Catiline was by no means the *dæmon* Sallust and Cicero would have us believe. I have a suspicion that the Gentleman in Black himself is "not so black as he is painted." But after all I do not consider Catiline—or the gentleman just alluded to—to be models of respectability and propriety, nor should I permit any dramatic poet quietly to assume the fact of their purity. That Messalina was a lascivious, reckless, cruel, vicious woman is beyond a doubt; the satire of Juvenal might be disregarded, but the Annals of Tacitus are precise and explicit. *Nihil compositum miraculi causâ, verum audita scriptaque senioribus tradam.* He says, "I invent nothing for the sake of narrating extraordinary things, I but relate that which aged men have written or said."

You remember that Messalina was wont to leave the sleeping Claudius attended by a single slave, her dark hair hidden beneath a yellow covering—

"Comite ancillâ non amplius unâ,  
Sed nigrum flavo crinem abscondente galero,  
Intravit calidum veteri centone lupanar."<sup>1</sup>

What follows I forbear to quote; Juvenal's Sixth Satire not being adapted for family reading. In these nocturnal orgies she assumed the name of Lysisca; and our authors, with admirable coolness, have chosen to make Lysisca, the courtesan, a real person, so like the Empress in appearance,

<sup>1</sup> Juvenal, Satire VI. 119.

that every one mistakes them for each other. Hence all the debaucheries of which Messalina is accused fall away from her, and she is as pure as ice ! Upon this resemblance the piece rests. Valéria (the authors were afraid to call her Messalina !) is the victim of her resemblance to a courtesan, and her reputation through posterity is to suffer from the same cause, until two chivalrous dramatists rescue her from opprobrium ! But the paradox is so frivolous it will not bear a moment's examination ; the most cursory glance over the pages of Tacitus will acquaint any one that—granted the existence of Lysisca, granted her resemblance to the Empress, granted that *she* must bear the weight of all the lupanarian caprices, there still remains the Empress by daylight and her debaucheries undisguised. One phrase in Tacitus lets me into the secret of her nature. When Suilius was accused, at her instigation, he defended himself with so much eloquence that he brought tears into the eyes of Messalina herself, “who, quitting the room *to wipe them away, admonished Vitellius not to let the accused escape.*” These tears were not tears of hypocrisy, I think ; but tears of sensibility. She could weep, and murder while she wept. The nervous excitable organisation which made her so insatiable in her lust for excitement, made her also easily moved to tears by the tones of eloquence.

Tragedy is not the place for historical paradoxes. If MM. Lacroix and Maquet really believed in Messalina's innocence, they could have written a dissertation to show it ; but their assumption of the fact is intolerable. All through the piece, I felt that the attempt to make this imperial courtesan a chaste and noble woman was an insult to the audience. But it is in keeping with the rest ! These men look upon history as an old warehouse, wherein theatrical masks and costumes are kept for the caprices



of theatrical amateurs: enter and choose what you like! Assort the spindle of Lucretia with the bracelets of Laïs; carry the spade of Cincinnatus in one hand, and with the other smooth the tresses of Lesbia; here is a toga which you may wear with Spanish "trunks"; here is the mask of a Roman hero which will suit a fast man to a *t*!

But how these authors would laugh at me for being serious with them! They who have not been serious with themselves! What do they care about Art, about History, about Taste? All they think of is "effect." Don't talk to me about Taste, tell me if such a "surprise" will bring down the bravos! Poetry, character, passion, consistency—all very respectable things in their way,—but the drama can so well dispense with them!

Ah, yes! it is undeniably true, the drama *can* dispense with them. The drama has ceased to be an Art and has become an Amusement: poetry, character, passion, consistency, are "not so very amusing," therefore we employ them not: *à quoi bon?* Instead thereof, we show you Rachel in two parts—now the chaste empress, and the next moment the luxurious courtesan. There you have a surprise! The mere effect of change in costume is worth the finest poetry! People may not feel the poetry—they are sure to understand the change of costume!

Let me say that Rachel plays her two characters enchantingly. She is grand, dignified, and pathetic as the Empress, giving to the nothings of her part a significance which was delightful, uttering the weakest phrases with a look and tone which made them memorable. Above all, I would beg attention to the exquisite manner in which she speaks to her child; maternal tenderness<sup>1</sup> and familiarity

<sup>1</sup> Yet Rachel, when she did not want to play Legouvé's Medea, alleged as a reason that the maternal note was wanting in her talent.



were never more artfully conveyed by an inflexion of the voice. In the character of Lysisca she tasks language to the utmost to convey any impression of her daring and voluptuous grace, her bright elegance, the *brio* of her manner! She flashed upon my sight as the realisation of a Bacchante in her maddening inspiration and beauty, in her exquisite elegance. She looked bewitchingly beautiful, and yet with a something unearthly, unhealthy, feverish, bewildering. For her sake you could do anything, you could commit any folly, almost a crime—but you could not love her!

“C’est Venus toute entière à sa proie attachée;”

but it is the grace and fascination of an orgie, not the gentle lovingness of a pure heart. Horace, Catullus, Tibullus, and Anacreon are brilliantly illustrated in Rachel’s Lysisca—she is Lalage, Lydia, Lesbia, Laïs—the ideal of the Greek and Roman courtesan!

But when all is over, when you have wondered at the picture of that voluptuous Lysisca, applauded her expressive singing—the very voice having a certain feverish tremulousness in it—and marvelled at the talent of the actress, what remains? You leave the theatre admiring Rachel, but what do you carry away with you of *Valéria*? No more than if you had but just gaped at a tight-rope dancer! Of all that bustle, all that situation, all that intrigue, all those effects that have kept you restless, curious, startled during four mortal hours, nothing remains but a sense of fatigue! And this they call the triumph of dramatic Art!

## CRITICISM.

*August 2, 1851.*

DURING the fortnight I have been separated from my "gentle reader" the subject of Criticism has frequently solicited my thoughts. Unable to criticise, I meditated on Criticism.<sup>1</sup>

And first, is Criticism a lawful occupation? St. Jerome in his tribulations over the Vulgate, which had cost him labours so immense, and had been met with criticisms so exasperating, exclaimed, "Had I been a maker of baskets no one would have troubled me!" It is very true; the maker of baskets courts no "bubble reputation," and is sheltered in obscurity. Yet even he, perchance, has to bear the Criticism of severe housewives; but the insult is private, because the transaction is private; if he aspire to a nobler glory he must endure a more public ignominy; soliciting the "gentle voices" of a multitude, he must be prepared for rotten eggs. St. Jerome himself, Vulgate in hand, could not escape inexorable Criticism, and I think he was weak to complain of it. None of us escape it. What is half our conversation but Criticism of our friends? Criticism more or less elaborate and official is the shadow which accompanies publicity. In spoken talk, or printed talk, opinions will find utterance. When a man sets up to instruct or amuse us, and for that instruction or amusement

<sup>1</sup> Lewes had been ill. The theatrical article of July 19 was headed "Vivian Ægrotat," and purported to be written by "Le Chat-huant" (the late Mr. E. F. S. Pigott). The introduction, however, is very much in Lewes's own manner. "Le Chat-huant" (adopting that pseudonym for the first time) deals mainly with opera in his first article; but his second (July 26) consists of a long and very enthusiastic notice of Victor Hugo's *Angelo* and Rachel's performance of *La Tisbé*.

demands our money as well as our applause, it is clearly a lawful thing in any or all of us to express our opinion, be that opinion scorn. Consider the presumption implied in publicity! A man assembles an audience, occupies their time, lightens their exchequer, under the express condition of representing Othello storm-tossed on the sea of passion, or Figaro, the restless *factotum della città*—and of so representing it that the high ecstasies of Art shall fill the spectator's soul. That is the implied stipulation. Othello turns out to be a stamping, ranting, spluttering gentleman with very imperfect knowledge of the English language, or Figaro has nothing but impudence: is Criticism *then* no lawful occupation?—is scorn no duty?

But the Critic has a higher office. He is the severe guardian of public taste. He has to keep a vigilant eye upon the universal tendency in all publishers, managers, and purveyors, to appeal to the lower appetites of men. He is the æsthetic Policeman. [Ah! how true that illustration! How often this æsthetic Policeman forgets his stern duty in the amenities of cold meat and pickles, and finds it impossible to speak the truth to his Amphytrion when that truth is not flattering!]

I dare say the *grands seigneurs* of criticism look down upon us weekly and daily Critics; occupied with theoretic considerations, studying only the great works of past times, all the merits of which have been pointed out, and all the faults discussed, they fancy criticism of ephemera must be easy and trivial. And no doubt much of the printed talk that distributes immortality to the successes of a day—seeing in every historical novelist a rival of Walter Scott, in every singer a Malibran, in every painter a Raphael—no doubt *this* is easy enough. But did it ever occur to you what a perilous thing it is to be forced to label as good or bad,

true or false, books, plays, pictures, singers, actors, *before* the world has decided? The Critic has no time given him to compare his impressions with the impressions of others; he cannot, like the *grands seigneurs* just referred to, turn back to what others have said; he has no finger-post to guide him; the book lies open before him, he has no guide but his own taste, he cannot wait, he must pronounce at once, pronounce at his peril. He may write "This will never do" against an *Excursion*, he may write "This is a work of genius" against the flimsiest fabric of the season's manufactory—and his judgment is at stake! To such a man, Criticism must be what Longinus defined it, the result of abundant experience—πολλῆς ἐμπειρίας τελευταίον ἐπιγένημα. Only long experience and tact can give him that rapidity and certainty of judgment; and with all his experience, with all his tact, how often he will make egregious blunders! Emerson says with great truth, "A deduction must be made from the opinion which even the wise express of a new book or occurrence. Their opinion gives me tidings of their mood, and some vague guess at the new fact, but is nowise to be trusted as the lasting relation between that intellect and that thing." This may help to explain the queer judgments given by even wise men on their contemporaries.

Having shown that Criticism is lawful, is difficult, and perilous, it would be easy to show how grave and lofty it may be. The Greeks—our teachers in all things—cultivated Criticism with becoming gravity. I could fill a column with the titles of lost works; but the names of Plato, Aristotle, Aristarchus, and Longinus are enough. I note an interesting distinction between Plato and Aristotle in their treatment of Art; the one proceeding deductively from some *à priori* principles, the other pro-

ceeding scientifically, deducing principles from the actual facts before him. Plato says "fine things" about Art; Aristotle aims at detecting the laws. Of Aristarchus we have only the tradition of a great name; Longinus—or another, for the authorship is not clearly made out—has left us a beautiful and interesting treatise on grandeur of style—falsely translated *On the Sublime*—and the Halicarnassian Dionysius some trumpery criticisms, which are sheltered from contempt by the august dignity of Greek. Latin literature has also its Critics: its Cicero, its Tacitus, its Quintilian—to be read with pleasure, ay and with profit. But I should like to send Quintilian to a "first representation," with the necessity of his proceeding straight from the theatre to the printing-office, and there sitting in judgment on the new work, his article to be read by thousands before he is awake on the morrow!

### INFANT PRODIGIES.

*September 6, 1851.*

I HAVE many objections against Infant Prodigies in general, and the Bateman children<sup>1</sup> in particular; but I do not share the indignation of critics at the "profanation of Shake-

<sup>1</sup> Miss Kate Bateman (Mrs. Crowe) appeared, with her sister Ellen, at the St. James's Theatre, in the autumn of 1851, under the management of P. T. Barnum. She was not quite nine years old. The two children played Richard (Ellen) and Richmond (Kate) in the fifth act of *Richard III.*; Shylock (Ellen) and Portia (Kate) in the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice*; Macbeth (Kate) and Lady Macbeth (Ellen) in the first and second acts of *Macbeth*; and Bombastes (Ellen) and Artaxominous (Kate) in *Bombastes Furioso*. They also appeared in several comediettas and vaudevilles. The last performance took place October 18.

sppeare," and the "degradation of the drama," seen by them in the Bateman performances. As to Shakespeare and "profanation," really, after seeing what I have seen, hearing what I have heard, ay, and what others have applauded too, this objection seems incomprehensible. "It is absurd to suppose children of eight and six can understand Shakespeare." It may not be absurd to suppose that "eminent" tragedians understand him; but it is a fact that they do not. "How can children feel these emotions?" They cannot: but your "eminent," also, does not feel them. They do what he does—speak the verses with traditional emphasis, express the passion in conventional symbols; everything is *taught*—tone, look, pause, gesture. The actor who gives all these according to the promptings of his own feelings, is as one man in ten thousand. If, therefore, the Bateman children suggest sarcastic reflections on the art of acting, whose is the fault?

As to degradation, that is an old story; old as Shakespeare, whose managerial jealousy speaks through Rosenkrantz. The children drew away his audience; for audiences were then, as now, and ever will be, gaping crowds, more curious about wonders than about art. Thus he speaks of them:—"But there is, sir, an aiery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question, and are most tyrannically clapped for't: these are now the fashion: and so berattle the common stages (so they call them) that many wearing rapiers are afraid of goose-quills, and dare scarce come thither." And this was in the "palmy days" of the drama! Later on, we have young Betty<sup>1</sup> eclipsing Mrs. Siddons. The very House of Commons broke up, and adjourned the business of the nation, rather than lose a performance!

<sup>1</sup> The Young Roscius. See Introduction to *Dramatic Essays*, vol. i., Leigh Hunt.



Then came Clara Fisher, whom I dimly remember; and little Miss Poole, whom I remember very well. Authors, actors, and critics may deplore this succession of Prodigies; audiences care little so that they are *amused*. That is the point. In Pliny's time they ran to see an elephant dancing on a tight rope, much to that philosopher's contempt; but, for my part, I should like to see an elephant dance on a tight rope—much more than to see "legitimate drama" by *very* "native talent," I could name! If a work of art is placed before me, I believe I can enjoy it; but I do not overlook the fact, that Art is one thing, another thing Amusement; and that people *do* like amusement, and will run after it.

My objection to the Bateman performances lies deeper; it is a moral, not a theatrical objection. In a society which approves of Factory Children and all other modes of exploitation by parental need, *or greed*, one has no right, I suppose, to be very indignant with parents who trade upon the talents and aptitudes of their infants; but, I confess, it does seem to me to be a wicked and unwarrantable thing to bring children thus before the public. Suppose them to be taught without pain; suppose them to attain their excellence spontaneously; and you still have to consider the moral atmosphere in which they are plunged. If late hours, bad air, excitement, study, do not ruin their physical health, what is to become of their moral health in this excess of stimulus—this flattery, these bravoos, these bouquets, this unnatural and deleterious atmosphere of theatrical success? They never know what childhood is! They are forced into unhealthy precocity. Their minds and feelings are not unfolded slowly, sweetly, as the rolling years bring new necessities and new experiences. They are taught to ape the humanity which one day *would* be

theirs; but now never will be, for their existences are *perverted*. They are early taught to simulate the forms of impassioned existence—thus to make life itself theatrical! And these young plants, thus fostered, prematurely fade: the forcing kills, or stultifies them. They die worn out; or they live poor, puny, rickety things, with no sap of vigorous life to sustain them under the neglect into which they have fallen now they no longer amuse! But who cares? Is not Infant Labour one of our Institutions, with which it is tyranny to interfere?

## THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR.

November 29, 1851.

I HAVE always considered *The Merry Wives*<sup>1</sup> one of the worst plays, if not altogether the worst, that Shakespeare has left us. The wit for the most part is dreary or foolish; the tone is coarse and farcical; and the characters want the fine distinctive touches he so well knew how to give. If some luckless wight had written such a comedy in our time, I should like to see what the critics would say to it? I know what *one* would say. But of course protected as it is by the reverence all Englishmen feel for "the Swan," critics leave it in peace. Let me, however, qualify my objection by confessing that here and there in the dialogue and in the characters, the delicate and powerful handwriting

<sup>1</sup> The season at the Princess's opened on Saturday, November 22, with *The Merry Wives*. Charles Kean was now sole manager. On Monday, November 24, George Eliot wrote to Miss Sara Hennell: "On Saturday afternoon came Mr. Spencer to ask Mr. Chapman and me to go to the theatre; so I ended the day in a godless manner, seeing *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. . . . Lewes sat in the same box with us, and helped to carry off the dolorousness of the play."

of Shakespeare is recognisable. In the first place, poor as the characters mostly are, they are all consistently drawn; there is no confusion, no equivoue possible. In the next place, Ford is a creation. If you wish to appreciate the art manifested in it, compare Ford's jealousy with that of Othello, or that of Leontes; and it will then become evident that Shakespeare's mastery lies in depicting *jealous men* not abstract *jealousy*. Slender, Bardolph, Pistol, Nym, and Caius are all exaggerations that have not the excuse of *vraisemblance*. But they are so marked in their peculiarities that the actor finds little difficulty with them.

If *The Merry Wives* deflects from the standard of Comedy, still more did its performance, on Saturday last at the Princess's, deflect from the standard of comic acting. Immense pains had been taken; the "strength of the company" had been collected; the dresses were picturesque and splendid; the scenery excellent. I saw everywhere *intention* (an excellent thing in management), but the effect ill responded to the labour. The piece was overdone with "business": almost every one—even to the very servants—striving to "make much" of his part; and this constant straining after effects which were *not* reached, became positively wearisome. Still more wearisome was the incessant laughter, where nothing laughable justified it. It was as if they had said so themselves, "This is a Comedy, and we must be comic—so we must laugh! and be noisy! gesticulate and slap each other on the back, when not nudging each other's ribs!" Instead of being comic they were dreary.

That was my general impression: the language may sound harsh, especially in these days of sugared criticism, but I cannot honestly soften it. Let me touch upon a few details. Bartley returned to the stage to play Falstaff. An

excellent actor, Bartley, in some characters ; but as he never could play Falstaff when in his prime, it is too much to expect that his having left the stage would be sufficient to qualify him for the part. The humour,—the unction,—the fat mirth of Sir John lies beyond his personation. He touches some points with finesse and intelligence ; but on the whole, his loudness, incessant laughter, and want of humour, make his performance tedious. Why does he emphasise so strongly phrases that are not emphatic ? Why, for example, must he say, or scream, “Well, gentlemen, by your *leave*,” as if it were some immense joke, when it is the mere adieu of departure ? Why, in the scenes between Sir John and Mrs. Quickly, must he and Mrs. Winstanley rival each other in loudness, laughter, and nudging ? When I objected to that in the hearing of a friendly critic, he answered, “Oh, it’s the conventional style.” But does *that* make it more admirable ?

Nothing could be worse than Harley’s Slender. It was buffoonery, and *not* amusing. Instead of Slender, we saw before us Harley as the Chamberlain in *The Sleeping Beauty*.<sup>1</sup> Addison as Mine Host was noisy, turbulent, and laughing where he should have acted. For the first time in my life I could see no excellence in Keeley’s acting—he played Sir Hugh Evans as if all his faculties were gathered up in the one effort to pronounce Welsh (which he didn’t), as if the *character* were left to shift for itself. Or was it a new reading ? If so, I cannot compliment him on it. Instead of the irritable, choleric, pedantic, Welsh parson, he presented a feeble, lackadaisical, *coward’y*, little man—understanding Sir Hugh’s “tremplings of mind” as referring to *fear*, when the whole context shows that the hot Welshman

<sup>1</sup> Three-act extravaganza by Planché, Covent Garden, April 20, 1840.

was excessively bellicose. I repeat, never before did Keeley seem other than a most humorous and intelligent comedian!

The best of the male characters were Charles Kean's Ford and Wigan's Caius, and they were really excellent. In serious comedy and melodrama Charles Kean is decidedly gaining the suffrages of those who even refuse him any qualities as an ideal actor. His Ford is the best Ford I have seen. The jealousy was sharply defined, the despair and rage were kept within bounds, so as not to trench upon tragic emotion, and produced a high comic effect. But I would hint to him that in one place he transgresses the limit set by good taste, and passes into displeasing farce—I mean where he *kicks* the old woman of Brentford. Let him avoid that, and his performance will be remembered as a true bit of comedy. Wigan's Doctor Caius was without blemish. His accent was French, his look was French, his rage was French: in dress, bearing, conception, he so realised the part, that he made human and interesting what Shakespeare has left as a caricature. Let me note also for praise the extremely picturesque appearance and unburlesque acting of Ryder in Pistol.

The Merry Wives were played by Mrs. Kean and Mrs. Keeley. The former's conception was excellent, and much of it distinctly realised; but here and there I noticed a little *over intention*—"something too much" of gesticulation and effort at being comic. Mrs. Keeley *was* comic—quietly, unobtrusively, irresistibly. Her reading of Falstaff's letter was delightfully joyous. Mrs. Winstanley *laughed* her part, and *emphasised* it: *act* it she certainly did not.

It is not often I enter thus into details; but the very severity of my general verdict forced me to point more definitely to those particulars which justified it.

## VIVIAN IN TEARS!

*(All along of Mr. Kean.)**February 7, 1852.*

WHAT a thing is Life! The remark is novel and profound—its application you will appreciate on hearing my appeal. Yesterday I was the gayest of the gay, blithe and joyous as a young bird before family cares perplex it in its calculations of worms; to-day you see me struck from that sunny altitude into the gloom of immeasurable despondency! Weep! weep with me, ye that have any tears! Let me, like a Prometheus of private life, fling my clamorous agonies upon the winds, and call upon every feeling heart to listen to my “billowy ecstasy of woe!”

Hear it, ye winds—Charles Kean has cut me off the Free List!

No more! never never more, am I to enjoy the exquisite privilege of seeing that poetic eye “in fine foolishness rolling!”—no more! never never more, am I to listen to that musical utterance of verse, that delicate expression given to subtle meanings! I am banished. Charles Kean closes his door upon me! He courted me, and courted my criticism—then I was happy! then I was proud! then I knew where to spend an intellectual evening; but now, alas! that glory is departed; it now appears that he did not like my criticism, and he cruelly robs me of my only enjoyment—the privilege of seeing him act! He humbles me, he saddens me, he leaves me no refuge but misanthropy! Oh, *why* didn't I write more glowingly about his genius; *why* did I not, by some critical alchemy, convert his peculiarities into talents; *why* did I not discover



eloquence in his pauses, variety and expression in his gestures, and intelligence in his conceptions? Fool that I was! I might have laughed at him amongst his friends, as remorselessly as they do, and still have preserved my precious privilege of free admission to the Princess's Theatre; but now! . . . As the not more unfortunate Philoctetes, banished from his loved Hellas, roamed disconsolate about the isle, so I pace Oxford Street with pale wistful glances, exclaiming:—

ἀλλ' οἱ μὲν ἐκβαλόντες ἀνοσίως ἐμὲ  
 γελῶσι σίγῃ ἔχοντες· ἡ δ' ἐμὴ νόσος  
 ἀεὶ τέθηλε, καπλὶ μείζον ἔρχεται.<sup>1</sup>

(That bit of Greek is especially meant for Mr. Kean—the immense intelligence displayed in his handling of English verse placing beyond question the assumption that he must be very strong indeed upon Greek verse, and, therefore, I won't translate it.)

Let me for a moment stop the flood of grief and review my position (through my tears). When Charles Kean was about to take the Princess's Theatre, he asked me if I would support him; because, he added, it was useless to embark in such a speculation unless he could get the Press to back him. I gave him the only promise I could give—I promised to do my best. I was glad to see a gentleman in the position. It looked well for the drama; and no one will dispute that it *has* been a great advantage—that he has made the Princess's a first-class theatre in every respect; and as far as the public is concerned, he has been an excellent manager. Hitherto I have kept my promise; but

<sup>1</sup> Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, ll. 257-259. "The men whose unholy hands have cast me out laugh and speak not of it; while my affliction is waxen fat and climbs ever higher."

I told him at the time that it was one thing to support a theatre by all friendly offices, and another to praise actors or pieces which I did not approve. Now mark! because I was silent in a case where, if I had spoken at all, it could only have inflicted a needless wound<sup>1</sup>—because I do *not* think Charles Kean a tragic actor, and never would say I did—because in short, while feeling and (as all who know me will testify) *expressing* a personal liking for him, I exercised towards him a privilege I do not withdraw even with regard to dearest friends—that, namely, of uttering my opinion—because, I say, my friendly articles were not fulsome eulogies, Charles Kean declared me “one of his bitterest enemies”; and now, I presume, because I said last week that Helen Faucit<sup>2</sup> was the greatest of our tragic actresses (a fact about which there are not two opinions), the “bitterest enemy” is told he cannot be admitted any more.

Poor fellow! poor fellow! to be so sensitive—and an actor! One hears of hens, in a soil where chalk is deficient, laying eggs without shells—nothing but a thin membrane to protect the embryo chick; how unpleasant to be such a chick!

As for me, I confess that I have long expected to be cut off the free list by some irate manager or other, but do not

<sup>1</sup> We cannot say with certainty what sin of omission Charles Kean is supposed to have specially resented. The principal plays performed at the Princess's during January were *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Hamlet*, *The Iron Chest*. No mention was made of the theatre during the whole month.

<sup>2</sup> In one of Lewes's many attacks upon Bunn's management (January 31, 1852) he wrote:—“Helen Faucit is engaged for a few nights, and will attract many glad to see her, even in such a company. She has faults, serious faults, but on the whole she is without question the finest tragic actress on our stage. But to see *Romeo and Juliet* so cast!”

respect the sagacity which has so exercised the managerial power. Can Mr. Kean suppose that by suppressing *free admissions* he suppresses *free speech*? Or does he think that no critic would be mad enough to rush into the utter extravagance of *paying* for a place to see him act? Let him undeceive himself. I shall be there on first nights as of old; the only difference will be this—that until he declared open war I still preserved my original position; henceforth I shall remember that kindly silence is interpreted as insult, and shall speak out just what I think. In concluding, let me say that whereas I would not suffer my criticism to be eulogistic when urged by *interest* (in the vulgar sense of the term—Mr. Kean will understand me),<sup>1</sup> so likewise I have too much pride to allow this last act to *pique* me into injustice.

## THE NEW HAMLET.

February 14, 1852.

I ALWAYS feel tenderly towards *débutants*, and watch their performances with a different eye to those of old stagers. If I do not let my tenderness issue in eulogies such as I read elsewhere, it is, I suppose, that my brother critics are more tender, or less fastidious. I cannot help my opinions; if they seem severe; I am assured by my own conscience that their severity is tempered in expression by a predetermination to do my office as kindly as I can. True, that kindness is strangely interpreted sometimes!

If Mr. Barry Sullivan<sup>2</sup> is to get but cold praise from me,

<sup>1</sup> No doubt an allusion to some proposal that Lewes should write, or adapt, a play for the Princess's.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Sullivan (1824-1891) made his first appearance in London at the Haymarket, Saturday, February 7, 1852, as Hamlet.

it is because his Hamlet was so very feeble, though less offensive than many of more pretensions. It was a mere reading of the part, and that reading elaborated, rather than elaborate. Steering clear of all the detonating violence of Charles Kean, he misses the settled gloom and overshadowing melancholy which make the first act of Charles Kean's Hamlet so fine; his sorrow is lackadaisical, womanish, unreal. The quietness with which he plays the part is highly commendable, and shows a fine ambition. It is surely a considerable merit that of not ranting! But *il y a fagot et fagot*, as Molière says—there is quietness and quietness: if it be more difficult for the actor to produce his effects quietly, it is because he must then rely upon intelligence and emotion, instead of lungs and gesticulation; but quietness *without* those is simply negative. Mr. Barry Sullivan's personation of the part is not Shakespearian in its broad outlines, nor is it felicitous in its details. He does not present to us a picture of the sceptical prince, suddenly smitten by a grief which becomes a calamity so great as to overwhelm his reason, and drive him into insanity. We undergo none of those emotions which such a picture of psychological evolution ought to produce—we see nothing of what is passing in Hamlet's mind to explain his acts. Mr. Sullivan read the part with fair intelligence (though he should not say Nēměān<sup>1</sup>), and played it with what may be

<sup>1</sup> On February 28, Vivian thus recurs to this subject:—"A correspondent writes to know my reason for reading 'Nemean lion' Nemėān? As I am never ashamed to own myself in error, I inform him that my reason was an erroneous one. Usually it is written Nemėān, and this it was which misled me, as it has misled many dictionary-makers. Virgil's authority, however, cited by my correspondent, settles the matter:

'Tu Cresia mactas  
Prodigia, et vastum Nemea sub rupe leonem.'"  
—*Æneid*, viii. 294.

called propriety; but the passion and the subtlety of the part are both beyond him. His gestures are graceful, but of a sort of *Keepsake* grace. Indeed, the phrase, a *Keepsake* Hamlet, would vividly express my view of his performance. What the engravings in *Annuals* are to fine pictures, or to Nature, that is his Hamlet to fine Hamlets, or Shakespeare. His appearance is prepossessing; and being young and ambitious, he may yet create a name for himself. We shall see him, however, in a new part<sup>1</sup> soon, and then, when not oppressed by the weight of Shakespeare, he will have a chance of showing us his quality. Meanwhile, let me call his attention to one defect. He has a tendency to screw up his features into a fixed and not very *expressive* expression, which is almost as bad as Charles Kean's perpetual blank look and open mouth, which do duty for all other expressions. In so quiet an actor as Mr. Barry Sullivan, the face ought to play a prominent part.

### KING JOHN.

*February 14, 1852.*

ON Monday [February 9] *King John* was revived at the Princess's, and I, like a sort of Oxford Street Tantalus, gazed at the bill, but could not feed my hungry eyes with the performance. Then it was I began to feel the anger of Jupiter Kean! Then it was I realised the misery of my lot—banished from

<sup>1</sup> On Saturday, February 14, was produced *A Woman's Heart*, in which Sullivan played a character named Angiolo. The authorship was kept secret till the fall of the curtain, when it was announced that the play was written by Miss Vandenhoff, who acted the heroine. Sullivan's performance, according to Lewes, showed that "as a juvenile tragedian he may be more serviceable to the theatre than as a performer of great parts."

that Theatre—excluded from the contemplation of that great man and greater actor. Then it was I sat in my lonely study, howling. *King John* with Charles Kean, and I not admitted! *Αἶ, αἶ, εἶ εἶ!* (You see, he is such a *classic* actor, that my very agonies disdain a less lofty expression than Greek!)

But there is a limit to human endurance. On Wednesday I would *not* be longer kept from the theatre, and I went. What I saw there shall now—in all seriousness be told you. I have dried my tears, and intend to jest no more.

Although *King John* contains some truly Shakespearian writing, and characters such as Falconbridge, Hubert, Arthur, Constance, and King John, the effect, on the whole, is very heavy, and the play needs some accessory attraction. Gervinus, indeed, thinks it a “tragedy of the purest water”—*vom reinsten Wasser* (whatever *that* may be); but he is a German, and accustomed to watery dramas: our audiences want something of a more riveting interest; they can enjoy poetry and character in their study. The audiences in Shakespeare’s day listened with hungry ears to all the poetry and history, because to them the stage was the source of almost all their literary culture; they were not reading audiences, and therefore could be interested by plays which weary our fastidious pit, who, as Goethe says, in the theatre prologue to *Faust*, have not indeed been accustomed to the finest things in the world, but unhappily are terribly well read—

“Zwar sind sie an das Beste nicht gewöhnt:  
Allein sie haben schrecklich viel gelesen!”

It seems clear, then, to me, that we must have some accessory attraction to replace that literary and historical



interest which originally made Shakespeare's historical plays acceptable; and therefore that Macready was wholly right in the principle of his revivals. Scenery, dresses, groupings, archæological research, and pictorial splendour, can replace for moderns the poetic and historic interest which our forefathers felt in these plays. All these things render *King John* attractive at the Princess's. No pains, no expense has been spared to make the spectacle gorgeous and minutely antiquarian. It surpasses everything in the way of *mise en scène* which this theatre has yet attempted; and while noting this prodigality of heraldic science, I could not help regretting that a misguided ambition should have led Charles Kean on the stage, when a post in the Herald's Office was a human possibility! The spectacle is truly pictorial and striking. I am not so learned in costume as to be able to say whether all the appointments are as accurate as they pretend to be; but I can assure you that they look very learned and mediæval. The groupings were admirable; and admirable also the movements of the crowd when in agitation—giving a "bustle" to the scene which communicated something of its agitation to the spectator; they were very unlike stage movements in general.

As a spectacle, I have unqualified praise to give it. As a tragedy, I was forcibly struck with the truth of a prophecy uttered by Kean's loving and beloved friend, Albert Smith, in *The Month*, which ran thus:—

"Let not Charles Kean deceive himself as to his position as an actor; he has none beyond that which appliances of *mise en scène* assist him to. *King John* is about to be revived for him. Our readers will see, judging calmly for themselves, that in spite of all the press laudations that will follow, it will simply be a success of tin, and banners, and

*Jewess*<sup>1</sup>-like panoply; a metallic triumph in every respect, including the brass."

The sentence is harsh, but in the main it is correct. Except Falconbridge and Hubert, the parts were played in a style altogether incommensurate with the demands of the play. Had Charles Kean allowed me to pursue my own friendly course towards him, I should have passed over the performance with some brief remark; but as silence is construed into insult, I am forced to speak my mind, and the only difficulty I have is how to say what I really think in the least offensive form. He won't believe that, because his irritable vanity makes him believe that no one can fail to admire except from "bitter enmity"; and he will attribute my criticism to "anger," whereas I am not "angry" at all—I only laugh. *My* public know me too well, I trust, to doubt the sincerity of my opinions, severe or favourable.

King John and Constance are two great tragic parts. Mr. and Mrs. Kean were decidedly effective in them, but I venture to doubt whether the effect was such as any poetic or cultivated mind can on reflection approve. Had the play been a *Porte St. Martin* melodrama, King John a house-breaker, and Constance a widow *de la rue St. Denis*, the acting would have been admirable; but every one must feel the difference between the impassioned grandeur of ideal sorrow, and the prosaic truth of domestic woe. As a bit of "truth," Mrs. Keeley's sobbing perusal of the letter in *Prisoners of War*<sup>2</sup> is without a rival; but imagine that order of truth transported into tragedy, and you at once

<sup>1</sup> Spectacular drama founded by Planché upon Scribe's *La Juive*, produced by Bunn, at Drury Lane, in 1835.

<sup>2</sup> Comedy by Douglas Jerrold, produced at Drury Lane (Macready's management), February 8, 1842. During the first run of the play, Mrs. Keeley's reading of this letter used to be encored nightly!

leap upon the platform whence to survey the chasm which separates tragedy from domestic drama. Mrs. Kean in the opening scene was ideal and graceful; her attitudes, her intonations, her whole conception promised well. But when the great storm of grief burst, she dropped from her elevation into domesticity of a not very pleasing kind; except in the sarcasms with which her indignant heart relieves itself against Austria (finely uttered), the wronged Constance was at no time before us. The grief and rage were well simulated, and by some of the audience loudly applauded, because the applauders recognised the "truth," but did not ask themselves "truth of what?—truth of whom?—truth of a Princess in her despair?—truth of a tragic heroine whose agonies are poetry?" It may be said, indeed, that Constance, though a Princess, was a woman, and probably a very unideal woman; at any rate Mrs. Kean, by representing the grief of a woman, represented nature. Specious, but false! Place Mrs. Keeley in the part, and let her represent womanly grief; no one will doubt that her representation would be intensely true, but could the audience accept it? If the defence be admitted, adieu to all personation! Grant Mrs. Kean her right of portraying Constance in a domestic light, stripped of all the elevation and grandeur of poetry, and, I repeat, her performance was very effective. But those who have seen Fanny Kemble, or Miss Glynn, or Mrs. Warner in the same part, will scarcely accept such a version.

Charles Kean, as King John, was just what you may expect, showing in one or two scenes a decided quality as a melodramatic actor, but nowhere, even by a look, showing the least penetration of Shakespeare's meaning. I will not quarrel with him for the permanent stolidity of his face and bearing; he cannot help that—it is his misfortune, not his

fault, as the man said of his blind horse. But I must object to the unkingly, unideal presentation of the whole part. In his two great scenes—the tempting of Hubert, and the death—he fell miserably below the character. The wonderful speech; “Hubert, I had a thing to say,” was an instance of what I meant in saying the performance was effective, though the effect was wrong. There was a certain breath-suspending, chilling horror, in his utterance of that speech, especially in the hoarse whisper of these words, “A grave,” which affected the audience, and which, had he been a melodramatic ruffian proposing a murder to his companion, would have been in fine keeping; but when one thought of it as the expression of that dark hinting at murder, which the poet has so wonderfully set forth, it was almost ludicrous. So again in the death-scene; the agonies were “true,” but they were the agonies of a Jew with the cholic, and produced tittering instead of sympathy.

Wigan’s Falconbridge fairly took me by surprise. I heard with regret of his playing the part, not believing him capable of the brawny gaiety of the Bastard. I was wrong. The first act, indeed, was too light, and seemed to justify forebodings: it was too much in his light comedy vein; but, as the play advanced, he rose in excellence, and was equal to all the exigencies of the part. You may observe that Falconbridge, who begins as a ribald, careless soldier, deepens into bitter irony when experience of the treachery of France has roused him, and, as the dark scenes of the play follow each other, he loses the gaiety of careless light-heartedness, and rises into personal consequence, till the conduct of affairs seems almost to rest with him. All these changes were broadly and truly marked by Wigan; and for intelligence in conception, and power of execution, his acting was *the* acting of the piece.

Ryder,<sup>1</sup> as Hubert, played with intelligence and rugged feeling, and was loudly applauded.

## DÉJAZET—THE CORSICAN BROTHERS.

February 28, 1852.

*Elle n'a pas d'âge!* is the universal exclamation:

“Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety.”

No young woman on the stage could be so young, and so captivating, as Déjazet<sup>2</sup> in the character of Richelieu at fifteen. It is not that one has to make allowances and say how “wonderful at her age!” The performance is intrinsically fine, wonderful at any age. A very thin house enjoyed her *Colombine*, but to *Les Premières Armes de Richelieu*<sup>3</sup> there was an immense house, and immense enjoyment in that house. The first is a tiresome *pièce à tiroir*, wherein the actress shows you her wardrobe, and exhibits her *faire*; but a singer might almost as well *sol fa* and call it singing. You admire the wardrobe, you admire the talent, but you yawn at the piece. In *Les Premières Armes de Richelieu*, on the contrary, we have a gay,

<sup>1</sup> John Ryder (1814-1885) served his apprenticeship under Macready at Drury Lane, and made his last appearance under the management of the brothers Gatti at the Adelphi.

<sup>2</sup> Pauline-Virginie Déjazet was born in 1797, and was therefore at this time fifty-five. She acted almost continuously from the age of five until within a few years of her death in 1875. Even after her nominal retirement she made frequent re-appearances, the last occurring at the Variétés less than two months before she died.

<sup>3</sup> Vaudeville by Bayard and Dumanoir, produced at the Palais Royal, December 3, 1839.



sparkling little comedy, without a superfluous passage, without a sentence that hangs fire, and with several phases of a character naturally presented. As the boyish, awkward bridegroom, just introduced at court, Déjazet was natural and charming: through that awkwardness, which was not without its grace, there shone a glittering wit and resolution, which prepared us for the change from the *naïve* boy into the cool, careless coxcombry of the man *au succès*. Very noticeable was the quiet truth of manner with which she received the "lesson" given by the Princess, who sends a box of *bonbons* as a *cadeau de nocces*; she did not exaggerate, even by a look, and the effect was very sensible. As for the delivery of *repartees*, no language can convey an idea of that—(at least, no language of mine. How quietly we gentlemen of the press assume that the standard of accomplishment must be measured by our incompetence, and because *we* are beggars in phrase, and know not the delicate secrets of a language which refuses nothing to happy ardour of search, declare "no words can paint this," or "it is impossible to describe that!") Déjazet's manner of uttering a slight phrase makes it flash upon you as a brilliant witticism. This is a service which good actors render authors, for which they do not often get the credit.

The piece was nicely acted altogether, and beautifully dressed. Lafont played the small part of the Chevalier, and made it an agreeable figure. Mdlle. Avenel was hearty, and not coarse, in the *bourgeoise* at court—a class of characters for which she is better suited than the class she played last season. The rest, though not good, were in-offensive.

An absurd prejudice exists, upon which I am tempted to make a remark. Because the best French actors are unquestionably excellent, our public, by an easy fallacy,



assumes that all French actors are good; and I hear on all hands the foolishest remarks depreciating our own actors, in favour of men and women whom I must call simply detestable, but who, because they are French, are applauded, and pronounced "so superior to anything on our stage." No one will accuse me of underrating French acting. When it is worst, it is not so bad as our bad acting. But it is often very bad; and I do not much believe in the talent of the second-rates. What our actors want, and what they might learn from the French, is the drawing-room quietness of well-bred acting—the subordination of "points" to character—the reliance upon nature. It is in these things that Charles Mathews surpasses all English actors, and has gradually earned for himself his peculiar reputation; it is by the absence of these that Charles Kean, out of melodrama, has acquired *his* peculiar reputation. Charles Kean, after vainly battling with fate so many years, seems now, consciously or unconsciously, settling down into the conviction that his talent does not lie in any Shakespearian sphere whatever, but in melodramas, such as *Pauline*,<sup>1</sup> or his last venture,

### THE CORSICAN BROTHERS,<sup>2</sup>

where, as high intellect is not *de rigueur*, he is not restricted by its fastidious exigencies. It is certainly worth a passing remark, to note how bad an actor he is in any part requiring the expression of intellect or emotion,—in any part demand-

<sup>1</sup> An adaptation, by John Oxenford, produced in the previous season.

<sup>2</sup> *Les Frères Corses*, adapted by E. Grangé and X. de Montépin from Dumas' novel of the same name, was produced at the Théâtre Historique, August 10, 1850. The English adaptation was produced February 24, 1852.

ing some sympathy with things poetical,—in any part calling for *representative* power; and how impressive, and, I may say, *unrivalled*, he is in gentlemanly melodrama. The successful portions of his tragic characters are all melodramatic; and in *Pauline* and *The Corsican Brothers* he satisfies all the exigencies of criticism. I shall not be suspected of partiality, and I beg the reader not to suppose any latent irony in my praise (for I am *not* afraid to praise Kean when that praise is due), and with this preface, let me say that *The Corsican Brothers* is the most daring, ingenious, and exciting melodrama I remember to have seen; and is mounted with an elegance, an accuracy, an ingenuity in the mingling of the supernatural with the real, and an artistic disposition of effects, such as perhaps no theatre could equal, certainly not surpass.

The first act sets forth Corsican life in its wildness, its superstitions, and its *vendetta*. An excellent scene is that of the reconciliation of the Orlandos and the Colonnas, and their relinquishment of the *vendetta*,—a scene both fresh and effective, and capitably played by Ryder; but it has nothing to do with the piece, and surprises by its presence in a French drama, where construction is always so careful. Its only office is to bring visibly before us the Corsican feeling about *la vendetta*. Besides this feeling, there is another indicated in this act,—viz., the mysterious affinity of the twin brothers, Louis and Fabian, through which they communicate at whatever distance. Fabian is now restless and uneasy, convinced that something has happened to his brother Louis; and, while he writes to him, to learn the truth, the spectre of his brother, with blood on his breast, appears to him. Nothing can exceed the art with which this is managed; with ghostly terror, heightened by the low tremolos of the violins, and the dim light upon the stage,

the audience, breath-suspended, watches the slow apparition, and the vision of the duel which succeeds: a scenic effect more real and terrible than anything I remember.

By a daring novelty of construction, the second act is supposed to go on simultaneously with the first, so that at the end of the second, the two are blended in one vision. The second act opens with a gay and brilliant scene of a *bal de l'opéra*, wonderfully well done,—the groups animated and life-like, the dresses splendid and various, and the drama naturally issuing out of the groups in the most unforced manner. The *action* of this act is simply the entanglement of Louis in the circumstances which lead to the duel wherein he is killed, as the vision of Act I. exhibited to us. The third act is brief, and is little more than the duel with Fabian, come from Corsica to avenge his brother; but it is surrounded with a number of superstitious circumstances that give a shuddering anxiety to every passage. Fabian and Chateau Renaud fight; during the pause, the latter leans upon his sword, and breaks it. Fabian, to equalise the combat, snaps his sword also; and both then take the broken halves, and fastening them in their grasp by cambric handkerchiefs, *they fight as with knives*. This does not *read* as horrible, perhaps; but to see it on the stage, represented with minute ferocity of detail, and with a truth on the part of the actors, which enhances the terror, the effect is so intense, so horrible, so startling, that one gentleman indignantly exclaimed *un-English!* It was, indeed, gratuitously shocking, and Charles Kean will damage himself in public estimation by such moral mistakes, showing a vulgar lust for the lowest sources of excitement—the tragedy of the shambles! But it is the fatality of melodrama to know no limit. The tendency of the senses is *downwards*. To gratify them stimulants must be

added and added, chili upon cayene, butchery upon murder, "horrors on horrors' head accumulated!" And herein lies the secret weakness and inevitable failure of Melodrame; the secret of the failure of *Le Théâtre Historique*, in spite of Dumas, in spite of Mélingue,<sup>1</sup> in spite of the concentration of "effects," in spite of vogue, scenery, dresses, acting, terrors, tears, laughter, the clash of swords, the clatter of spurs, the spasms of agony, the poniards, the poisons, the trap-doors, and moonlight effects—bankruptcy was the goal to which all tended! The secret, as I said, lies in the fact that Melodrame appeals to the lowest faculties, the avenues to which are very limited, consequently the influence is soon exhausted; whereas Drama appeals to the highest faculties, and *their* avenues are infinite.

But I will not philosophise; enough for the present that the *Corsican Brothers* is a Melodrame, full of invention, riveting in interest, put on the stage with immense variety and splendour, and very finely acted. Leave the æsthetic question aside, and consider the Melodrame *as* a Melodrame, and, short of the horrible termination, I say we have had nothing so effective for a long while.

Charles Kean plays the two brothers; and you must see him before you will believe how well and how *quietly* he plays them; preserving a gentlemanly demeanour, a drawing-room manner very difficult to assume on the stage, if one may judge from its rarity, which intensifies the passion of the part, and gives it terrible reality. Nothing can be better than the way he steps forward to defend the insulted woman at that supper; nothing can be more impressive than his appearance in the third act as the avenger of his

<sup>1</sup> Etienne-Marin Mélingue (1808-1875), a great melodramatic actor, who created, among many other characters, Dumas' D'Artagnan and Dantès (*Monte-Cristo*). He was also a sculptor.

brother. The duel between him and Wigan was a masterpiece on both sides : the *Bois de Boulogne* itself has scarcely seen a duel more real or more exciting. Kean's dogged, quiet, terrible walk after Wigan, with the fragment of broken sword in his relentless grasp, I shall not forget. Nor can I forget Wigan's performance. In "make-up," in demeanour, in look, in tone, he was perfect—the type of a French duellist.

### FRÉDÉRIC'S DON CÉSAR.

March 13, 1852.

A MORE unfortunate piece, as regards attractiveness, Mr. Mitchell could not have chosen for Frédéric Lemaître's<sup>1</sup> re-appearance [St. James's, March 8]. Every theatre in London and the provinces has had its *Don César de Bazan*,<sup>2</sup> until people are wearied of the name on the bills. Nevertheless, for those who went to see Frédéric there was a treat in store. Perfectly unapproachable is that picturesque, original, fantastic buffoonery—so graceful, and yet so absurd! The *grand d'Espagne* has squandered his fortune, has

<sup>1</sup> Frédérick Lemaître (1800-1876) was called "the Talma of the boulevard." His most famous characters are noticed in this and subsequent articles. He also created Kean in Dumás' *Désordre et Génie*. His personal habits, unfortunately, bore too much resemblance to those of Kean. We have retained Lewes's spelling of his name in the text, but "Frédérick" seems to have been the accepted form.

<sup>2</sup> By Dumanoir and Dennery, produced at the Porte-Saint-Martin, July 30, 1844. The character of Don César, as Lewes notes later, was borrowed from Victor Hugo's *Ruy Blas*. D. G. Rossetti, writing to his brother William from Boulogne, December 1, 1844, says, "Conspicuous among the fashionable arrivals stands that wandering Spaniard, that dramatic cholera, the accursed De Bazan." The drama was, says his biographer, "then unevadable, being played all over Europe."



soiled his reputation in the company of sots and blackguards; but he has preserved his honour, and with it something of the dignity and grace which he inherited with his name—the dignity to be resumed whenever the occasion needs it; the grace abiding! The fiery pleasure of wine—the excitement of the dice-box—the fascination of facile amours—the demoralisation of debts, have made him a blackguard; but Nature gave him the birthright of a gentleman, and through all his ragged dissoluteness shines the original splendour of his nature: his pourpoint may be old, stained with wine, and torn in a hundred quarrels, but you see it *is* a pourpoint, and you know what it must have been. Vividly and artistically does Frédéric paint that picture. He has the freedom of a master-hand, conscious of the truth which will appear in its most vagabond caprices! The first three acts are unrivalled. In the two last, there is great fault to be found with him; and I wish to insist more strongly upon his defects, because they are essentially *stagey* errors, and, with the sanction of his immense reputation, are likely to be dangerous.

If there is one thing which separates the Artist from the Actor, it is the subordination of details to a whole—the refusal to make “points” when those “points” are not details of character. All actors sin in this way. Applause is the only test they have; and if they can raise a laugh, the laugh is held as valid warrant for the means which produced it. If you object to an actor for some misplaced action, look, or intonation, he will infallibly reply, “But, you see, it *told*,” *i.e.* laughter saluted it. But we have only to extend the licence a little, and its absurdity becomes apparent,—we have only, for example, to ask what the effect would be if a Hamlet, eager for points, were to “go in for comic business” in his playful scenes: let us suppose



him digging his elbow in Polonius's ribs, would the certain laughter justify the "point"? Actors forget that an audience may laugh—and despise. The sudden transition may startle risibility, but it will not carry approbation.

I confess how Frédéric, in that scene with the king, made me laugh; but I add that the muscles of my face had not resumed their quiet condition, before my judgment revolted at the means by which the laughter had been raised.<sup>1</sup> Buffoonery, which was amusing in the earlier scenes, became intolerable as the tragic earnestness of the situation deepened: instead of the wronged husband and dishonoured nobleman (such as that scene demands), he threw over the character the buffoonery of Robert Macaire; but this did not leave him even in the final scene, where Don César stands forth, imposing, almost heroic.

Efface that stain from his acting, and what a performance it is! What dignity and impassioned grace in the serious passages!—what boundless caprice in the comic! He is the greatest melodramatic actor this age has seen, and unlike all other great actors!

## RUY BLAS.

*March 27, 1852.*

THAT Victor Hugo is a man of incontestable talent, I, for one, will not deny; but that he is a *poet*, with all his fine

<sup>1</sup> "He quite spoiled by vulgarity the effect of his retort when the King, not knowing him, gives himself out as Don César: 'Vous êtes Don César de Bazan? Eh bien! alors je suis le Roi d'Espagne.' . . . The grotesquely extravagant feather which danced in his hat was suited to a pantomime or burlesque, but very unsuited to the serious situation of the drama."—Lewes, *Actors and Acting*, p. 76.

passages, or a *dramatist*, with all his splendid *coups de théâtre*, I cannot bring myself to admit; and very queer is it always to me when I hear critics scoffing at Racine and applauding Victor Hugo—as queer as it would seem to a painter if Raphael were scorned for R. B. Haydon!

Victor Hugo's talent for *mise en scène*, his invention for striking and terrible situations, his dramatic *intentions*, so to speak, have misled people into the belief that he is a dramatic poet. But there is one fundamental want in all his pieces: a want of life. The figures move, but with the movement of galvanised corpses, and with visages as hideous. There is no heart, no reality, no pulse of life. Nothing but antitheses and tirades. Pre-occupied with "effects," and like a true rhetorician thinking only of literary "effects," he sacrifices everything to an antithesis. When reproached for this unhealthy craving he replied, "People object to my love of antithesis; as if God were not still more antithetical than I!" Apart from the frightful bathos of this reply, do note its absurdity! But neither bathos nor absurdity can have a limit with the poet who imperiously demands from Heaven an explanation of the great mystery in these terms:—

"Et maintenant Seigneur *expliquons nous, tous deux!*"

I should like to place before him Charles Nodier's opinion of antithesis:—"figure aussi incompatible avec la belle construction poétique qu'elle l'est avec la vérité et la raison; qui brise, qui mutile, qui dénature la pensée; qui contraint l'esprit à s'occuper sans cesse de comparaisons et de contrastes." With Hugo it is not a vice of language merely, it is equally a vice of conception. All his works are built up out of antitheses. Let us cast but a glance at

*Ruy Blas*,<sup>1</sup> that long and tiresome drama with which we were afflicted on Friday night.

The central position is an antithesis—the lackey loves and is loved by the queen—the minister disgraced because he will not marry a servant whom he has seduced, revenges himself by making his servant the lover of the queen. There is also the eternal recurrence of *l'ange et le démon*, without whom Hugo's muse seems unable to move: the demon is Salluste, the angel is the queen. *Ruy Blas* himself

“Au lieu d'un ouvrier on a fait un rêveur.”

Thrown on the streets, friendless and penniless, he becomes, of course, a poet and a dreamer (as Didier, in *Marion de Lorme*, before him), and the dreamer ends by donning the livery of a valet; and the valet ends by becoming prime minister and lover of the queen. *Peste! comme on y va!* Then there is Don César de Bazan (the original of the character in the celebrated drama)

“Drapant sa gueuserie avec son arrogance,”

an impersonation of the chivalrous blackguard; and so the play goes on from antithesis to antithesis, much to the fatigue of the spectator, who, for a little touch of nature, a little impulse of feeling, would so willingly give all this cold and glittering epigram.

That there are capital situations in this play, and some energetic lines, will not soften the verdict; it has the irredeemable defect of seeming unreal from first to last; and if the ear is gratified by a fine verse now and then, it is more often offended by such as these:—

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<sup>1</sup> Produced at the Renaissance, November 8, 1838.

“Parle ! ravis-moi !

Jamais on ne m’a dit de ces choses là, j’écoute !

Ton âme en me parlant *me bouleverse toute !*”

These are naïvetés which Hugo and his school naïvely believe are Shakespearian !

Bad as the play is, the acting was worse. You know what I think of Lemaitre, and may imagine the shock my admiration must have received before I could write this sentence : he was as bad as a fine actor *could* be ! He whirled his arms about like a delirious windmill ; he mouthed and ranted with explosive bursts that would not have disgraced Charles Kean in his most Shakespearian moments ; he was neither dreamy, terrible, loving, nor pathetic. To see so fine an actor—one who can be so impassioned, so real, so pathetic—labouring in vain to represent the emotions of his part, and not succeeding in the slightest degree, puzzled and set me meditating on the cause. For observe, the failure was not one of degree ; Frédéric was not *less* admirable than on other occasions—he was simply not admirable at all : the failure was total, absolute !

It then occurred to me that the reason of this failure was the *unreality* of the part. Frédéric’s greatness consists of two distinct things—his original and fantastic buffoonery, and his intense perception of the details which represent a real emotion. Give him a part like Robert Macaire or Don César, and his magnificent buffoonery enchants you ; give him a part like the gambler in *La Vie d’un Joueur*,<sup>1</sup> or like Paillasse,<sup>2</sup> and his pathos goes direct to the heart. But

<sup>1</sup> *Trente ans, ou la Vie d’un Joueur*, by Ducange and Dinaux, produced at the Porte-Saint-Martin, June 19, 1827.

<sup>2</sup> *Paillasse*, drama by Dennery and Fournier, produced at the Gaîté, November 9, 1850, known in England as *Belphegor the Mountebank*. In the previous number of the *Leader*, speaking of Paillasse, “Vivian” said : “Much as I admire Frédéric, I never admired him with the same unmisgiving fervour as on Friday night.”

give him an heroic part, and he is out of his element; he does not feel himself at home in it; he knows not the details which incarnate it; he becomes an ordinary actor. This was entirely the case with Ruy Blas, which is utterly unreal, and gives the actor no chance. People commonly suppose that it is the actor who makes the play; but although the actor may spoil the part, he cannot make one; and that is the answer to those who assert that Rachel's genius alone makes Racine effective—her genius cannot make the modern writers effective!

Let me, in concluding, say a word in favour of Clarisse, who played the Queen, not indeed with queenly dignity, but with as much womanly tenderness as the part admitted.

I had been always told that Ruy Blas was Frédéric's greatest part. I have now seen it for the first, and, I pledge you my honour, for the *last* time.

## THE TRUE CHARLES KEAN AT LAST!

*March 27, 1852.*

It has been said, in not very elegant Latin, that vainly do you expel Nature with a fork, she *will* come back again. The fact is, Nature is a woman, and will have the last word. See the truth illustrated in the career of that remarkable actor, Charles Kean, who, bearing the burden of his father's name—a name associated with Shakespeare (but rejoicing, I would have you know, in a genius of a totally different order)—has been condemned by the force of circumstances to strut and fume (and how he has strutted! how fumed!) his hour on the stage as a Shakespearian actor, Nature all the while having sternly said to him: "Charles, you have no faculties for poetic representation; Charles, you do

not know what poetry is, and there is a vulgar prejudice abroad which demands that before representing a part you should know something of what it means. Why strain your lungs at Shakespeare?" Nature might speak, but there was the conventional fork expelling her, and insisting upon Shakespeare being performed!

Now, Charles Kean could not overcome circumstances; but, like an adroit man, he made use of them. Born with a decided aptitude for melodrama, he exercised himself as a melodramatist in the plays of Shakespeare. He knew he could not play Othello, Macbeth, Lear, Romeo (I should like to see his Romeo!), the public knew it, too; but an actor must learn his art, and all the time he was detonating through Shakespeare he was silently training himself for Dumas. We critics were all on a wrong scent! It was not Othello, it was not Macbeth he was trying to play, it was *The Corsican Brothers*, it was *Pauline*. There lay his taste, there lay his talent. He has revealed himself at last. In *Pauline* and in *The Corsican Brothers* he is excellent; one desires nothing better of its kind. He has found his vein, the public appreciates it, success is won. Let him peril it no more by Shakespeare (unless in parts like Ford, which he plays admirably). Let him frankly take position as the hero of the Blood and Bogie School, and leave Poetry in unmangled repose.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> On June 12, in noticing Lovell's *Trial of Love*, "Vivian" writes: "Ever since Charles Kean quarrelled with me, he has taken a base advantage of me by acting so well that I have had to *praise* him. Now is that fair? But my time will come!" Kean would probably have been willing enough to dispense with such "praise" as this.



## ROBERT MACAIRE.

*April 3, 1852.*

WITHOUT Robert Macaire<sup>1</sup> this nineteenth century of France would want a type. It is no small thing for an actor to have created such a type; and that Frédéric has done. Other parts may be played by other men, but Frédéric *is* Robert Macaire; and a more quaint, fantastic, graceful piece of philosophic buffoonery does not exist. I am not here to criticise a performance so universally known; but a word upon the celebrated snuff-box may not be out of place. To my astonishment I find a dramatic critic saying, "the snuff-box was as eloquent as ever." If you must know in what that eloquence consists, learn that whenever Robert Macaire opens his box, in turning round the lid it gives a squeak, and whenever it squeaks the foolish audience laughs, as if some exquisite joke were there! To my mind, so great an actor as Frédéric might very well dispense with so cheap and easy an art of tickling the ears of the

<sup>1</sup> Robert Macaire was originally a sombre bandit and gaol-bird in a melodrama entitled *L'Auberge des Adrets*, by MM. Benjamin Antier, Saint-Amand, and Paulyanthe, produced at the Ambigu-Comique, July 2, 1823. It was roundly hissed on the first night, when Frédéric Lemaître followed the authors' instructions and played the part seriously. On the second night he took his own way with it and made it a piece of grim and gigantic buffoonery. The success was immense, and Macaire soon became an accepted type, to which the actor was always adding fresh touches of grotesque imagination. In 1834, he himself, in collaboration with Benjamin Antier, produced at the Folies-Dramatiques a three-act comedy entitled *Robert Macaire*, a sequel to the original play. It was *L'Auberge des Adrets* which was now acted at the St. James's (March 26). Théophile Gautier has called Macaire and Bertrand "the Don Quixote and Sancho Panza of crime." Macaire is also the hero of a famous series of caricatures by Daumier.

groundlings; and yet, to show how some physical detail arrests the attention of the crowd, nine people out of ten, in speaking of Robert Macaire, will infallibly mention the snuff-box, as if Frédéric's talent were illustrated by that! I remember standing before Rauch's statue of Blücher with an Englishman, whose admiration found a vent in this remark: "Look at the *spurs*!—how wonderful!" Here the detail which his practical experience appreciated was to him of more consequence than all the rest of the statue—Rauch must be a great sculptor who could represent spurs with that fidelity!

But because I think the snuff-box business trivial, I must not be supposed to depreciate a performance which is perfectly unrivalled. "Age cannot wither nor custom stale its infinite variety." I think Lemaître detestable in tragedy, and inimitable in drame and buffoonery. Ruy Blas was afflicting; the scenes from *Trente ans, ou la Vie d'un Joueur*, proved that his day has passed for those great effects he used to produce; but in Don César, Robert Macaire, and Paillasse he must be praised in hyperboles.

## EGMONT AND THE GERMAN ACTORS.

June 5, 1852.

ALTHOUGH not a good play in any theatrical sense, *Egmont*,<sup>1</sup> like every work of that immortal writer, retains a deep hold on the mind that has once read it: the qualities demanded in a scenic picture of life may be found more prominent and vigorous in far inferior writers; but the profound humanity, the organic creation, every touch of which speaks

<sup>1</sup> St. James's Theatre, June 2, "first representation in this country of Goethe's play of *Egmont*."

the poet, and, finally, the bright happy life that animates this work, make it something higher and deeper than an amusement.

*Egmont* was written in two strange and culminating epochs of Goethe's life. It was commenced and sketched out in 1775, when he had just broken away from Lili; it was finished in Italy, when he had broken away from the turbulence of youth, and commenced his great career of serene and noble life. Can one not hear something of both epochs in the accents of this play? He had parted from Lili—*why* I will some day endeavour to explain<sup>1</sup>—but his heart still yearned towards her. He lingered about her house, of nights, wrapped in his cloak, mournfully happy if he could but catch a glimpse of her shadow on the curtain as she moved about the room. One night, as he stood there beneath the stars, he heard her singing. What was her song? It was the one he had written to her in the fresh morning of their love!

“Wherefore so resistlessly dost draw me?” etc.

Her voiced ceased. She rose and walked up and down the room, little knowing how her sorrow was shared by him that caused it—little knowing who stood beneath her window struggling with his feelings; struggling but conquering, as his victorious nature ever did.

Goethe always sought consolation in Art. With *Egmont* he cheated sorrow; and, although *Egmont* is a tragedy,

<sup>1</sup> Lewes's *Life of Goethe* appeared in 1855. In the *Leader* of February 14, 1852, there appears a review by Lewes of Emerson and Channing's *Life of Margaret Fuller*, in which he quotes her account of a dinner at Carlyle's where she met “a witty, French flippant sort of man, author of a *History of Philosophy*, and now writing a *Life of Goethe*, a task for which he must be as unfit as irreligion and sparkling shallowness can make him.”

how little tragic emotion there is on the surface! To find *that* you must pierce deep. For Goethe—as the noodles tell you—was “so cold!” Noodles who never penetrate beyond surfaces!

*Egmont* is not, properly speaking, a tragedy; nor is it, as commonly said, a great historic play: it is a profoundly *human* play. Had Goethe been an historic mind he would certainly have produced a great painting of history here, in lieu of the individual, human picture it has pleased him to paint; for the time was pregnant with historic impulse. Frederic the Great—over whom Carlyle now ponders—was resting on his splendid laurels. Catherine of Russia, that great Empress, towered in the North. Paoli had struck for liberty. Washington and Franklin had achieved it. But Goethe, absorbed by Man, had little or no thought of the universal life which moves through History. “I and my immediate circle,” he says, “did not meddle with the news of the day: our affair was to *study Man*: men in general we allowed to go their own way.” An indifference which draws forth from politicians like Mazzini a burst of passionate scorn: a scorn any one can understand who contemplates Mazzini’s splendid and disinterested life, or who gazes on the “*victorious* sadness of his countenance” (to use the beautiful epithet applied to him by an exquisite friend of mine), but a scorn, nevertheless, which I take to be one-sided and unwise. It is idle to quarrel with so great a nature as Goethe’s because it was *not different* from what it pleased God to make it.

And, frankly, what amount of historic insight and local colouring could be accepted in lieu of such deep poetic insight as we have here in *Egmont* and Clara? Suppose the play a political manifesto—would any one,—except in hours of commotion—and genius creates for *all* times—prefer that to the drama of the brain and heart acted here?

No. The free and joyous and almost god-like carelessness of Egmont is worth a whole tribune of patriotic orators, for in him we see Humanity, not a *mood*. But I will not argue this point. Let me rather turn to the German troupe whom Mr. Mitchell has brought over for the delectation of a *blasé* public.

The house was overflowing; the audience in ecstasies; the success of the experiment unequivocal. I was sure it would be so. Novelty, fashion, and a legitimate curiosity were not bad things for a manager to speculate upon; and considering how ignorant the public is, how incapable of appreciating Art, how willing to take for granted that foreigners must be artists, there is no reason to suppose that any deficiency in quality will interfere with the monetary success of this speculation. I am glad of it: for Mr. Mitchell, above all managers, deserves to succeed: he is enterprising, generous, and keeps faith with the public.

But you want to know what I think of these Germans? As far as I could gather, there were only three persons in the house who shared my opinion; but this imposing minority satisfies me; and not being accustomed to take my opinions from any higher authority than the Big Wig who holds his court in my breast, I shall "fearlessly declare" (as writers say when they are under *no* sort of peril whatever) that my admiration of the acting was that which one feels for mature mediocrity—mediocrity without crudeness,—ripe, perfect, untroubled by a hope of future development!

Herr Emil Devrient<sup>1</sup> is accredited as the greatest tragic

<sup>1</sup> Emil Devrient (1803-1872) was a nephew of the great Ludwig Devrient. He made his first appearance in Brunswick in 1821, and his last in Dresden (where he passed the greater part of his life) in 1868. His chief parts were Shakespeare's Hamlet and Coriolanus, Goethe's Tasso, Egmont and Orestes, Schiller's Fiesco, Ferdinand, Posa, and Leicester.



actor now living in Germany. I saw him years ago with very mitigated admiration, and last night that feeling was not changed. He is a fine-looking, not ungraceful man, with a hatchet face and a good voice. He treads the stage as "to the manner born;" speaks with an agreeable accent, and a cultivated intelligence, so that you feel you are listening to a gentleman, and one who understands what he is saying. He is never great; he has no flashes of genius; he never thrills you; but he is free from rant, extravagance, and tricks of all kinds. If I call him a German version of Davenport,<sup>1</sup> or something like what Wallack is in tragedy, I shall tolerably convey my impression. The great defects are a want of impulse, a want of light and shade, and a want of self-identification with the passion of the part; he is always an actor, and you see him acting! Thus, in that exquisite love-scene, where Egmont comes in his splendour to gratify Clara's feminine love of display—that scene which Scott appropriated in *Kenilworth* with a coolness not surpassed by Dumas himself—Herr Devrient, instead of representing the playful tenderness and affectionate sympathy of a great man yielding to his mistress, and enjoying her girlish admiration, looked far more like a juvenile tragedian entering the green-room and asking the *soubrette*, "How do you like my *make-up*?" Why, such a scene as that should have something of the gentle strength and compassionate lovingness painted on the face of Millais' Huguenot soldier—a sympathy with the feelings of his mistress, such as the oak must feel for the tendrils that enclasp it. But Herr Devrient admired himself almost as much as she did! "*Me voilà!* what do you think of me now?"

<sup>1</sup> E. L. Davenport (1814-1877), an American actor of the second rank.



Then, again, the love-making of that love-scene! Did Herr Devrient ever look lovingly into the depths of loving eyes, or sit hand-clasped beside one whose life leaped to meet his, that he can present us with *such* a picture of a hero's love? His face—which has but two expressions—told nothing of what might have been passing in Egmont's breast; his tones revealed nothing, his gestures nothing: Goethe had given him words to utter, and he uttered them—that is all.

You observe, I measure Herr Devrient by the standard of his own pretensions, not by the standard of contemporary acting. Place him beside Charles Kean, or Anderson, for example, and severity passes into admiration. What he may do with other characters remains to be seen; but from last night I have seen enough to assure me that a great actor he neither is nor will be.<sup>1</sup>

Clara was played by Frau Stolte, a pretty-eyed, ingenuous woman, whom I should like to see in comedy. Her Clara was natural; but, as I often say, according to *whose* nature? Is Clara a genial loving girl of humble life, proud of “keeping company” with a fine gentleman? Then nothing could well be more charming. But Egmont did not make a *bauer-mädchen* his mistress. Under all the *naïveté* and ignorance of Clara there is a refined poetic nature: and *this* is the nature according to which the actress should be natural!

Of the others, I will only mention Herrn Birnstill and Denk [Vansen and Jetter], whose grotesqueness seemed to promise that if Mr. Mitchell would give us German comedies, instead of tragedies, there might be something

<sup>1</sup> “The acting of Herr Emil Devrient as Egmont was the great triumph of the evening, and established thoroughly in London his title to the honours accorded to him on the German stage.”—Henry Morley, *Journal of a London Playgoer*, p. 45.

more than gratified curiosity, and, "German without a master"—there might be amusement!

### KABALE UND LIEBE.

June 12, 1852.

THERE are many people who, in the innocence of their hearts, envy me and my brother-critics our "privilege" of seeing and hearing all the novelties. "It must be *so* delightful to be able to go to operas, and German plays, and French plays, and concerts, and exhibitions, and private views!" Very delightful *to be able*; but what do you think of being *forced* to go? I make up my mind, perhaps, to a quiet evening with my books, and the day-dream is shattered by Levassor in two new pieces; instead of thinking the great thoughts of noble minds, I have to laugh for three hours, and listen to platitudes of criticism. To be sure, the stately Harriet is almost certain to be in the stalls—

"And Beauty draws me with a single hair."

That is compensation! Another night I have a seductive invitation which cannot be accepted, because of Emil Devrient and the German plays—

"And Duty draws me with a single Herr!"

*Die Grosse Idee der Pflicht*, the great idea of Duty, Kant has reason to exalt; it rules the world—and critics. Duty called me to *Don Carlos*—as Glendower called spirits from the vasty deep—and with similar success: I didn't go. I once sat out *Don Carlos*, in Berlin or Dresden, and I pledge you my word, that all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't drag me to it again. It is not much of a favourite

with me as a poem to be read, but as a piece to be acted . . . ! Alfieri, in *Filippo*, has treated the story with intense dramatic power; Schiller has made it the utterance of some impassioned eloquence in favour of liberty, but has missed the tragic and dramatic style.

On Tuesday [June 8], Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*—his second work<sup>1</sup>—was produced for the gratification of a public which believes that because Schiller is a great name it can only sign greatness. I hope the public was sufficiently bored on Tuesday to have distinctly made up its mind about this piece, one of the worst; and the worst acted, I have endured for some time. For crudity of expression and absurdity of dramatic conception—for outrages against taste, truth, interest, *Kabale und Liebe* is more than enough to justify Goethe's profound repugnance to the "*Sturm und Drang*" period of Schiller's career. Then the acting! Herr Devrient, as the young lover, contrived to destroy the mitigated admiration he excited in me by his Egmont. I must say it, without disguise—his acting was as bad as an intelligent man, accustomed to the stage, could make it. In repose, he looked and stood like one of the pretty officers in the pretty pictures of Fashions; in agitation, he was lackadaisical, loud, ungraceful, and, at times, immensely ludicrous. Herr Devrient's qualities are, a handsome person, a good voice, an unusually good German accent, and a cultivated elocution: qualities available in the higher kind of drama, where ideal treatment is required; but when the drama descends into the sphere of actual experience, then is the *actor's* capability tried, for then he must simulate emotion, represent character. I do not believe in Herr Devrient's power to do either. His face is inflexible, his voice wants the modulations of passion, his gestures are

<sup>1</sup> His third work; *Fiesco* as well as *Die Räuber* preceded it.

"pretty" when not absolutely conventional. But the audience applauded him, and recalled him, as if he had been a genius. It was "another blaze of triumph."<sup>1</sup>

Gallantry forbids my mentioning the ladies; but one genuine bit of comic acting, perfect in its way, I must mention, and that was Herr Schrader's representation of the foppish Baron von Kalb—a German fop, such as I have jostled in countless salons and embassies. The recollection made me shout with hilarious gusto: as a bit of character, it was quite a study. Voice, gesture, expression—all were perfect.

## HAMLET<sup>2</sup> AND THE GERMAN ACTORS.

June 19, 1852.

I ONCE had a maternal uncle (had, alas! vixit!) whose views on the drama were freely communicated to me in the high and buoyant days when five-act tragedies in swelling verse were the dream and occupation of my life. He resided in Bungay, where he adorned a large domestic circle with all the virtues of a citizen, and earned the eternal gratitude of mankind by his improvements in soap!

In soap! Imagine Vivian in connection with saponaceous commerce! But biography has no delicacy, and facts are shattering to all illusions; and the fact is as I state. This free-spoken uncle was an anticipation of the Fast School of Critics. He snored at five-act dramas, and

<sup>1</sup> In the scene which closes the second act, says Professor Morley, Devrient "raised the whole theatre to instantaneous enthusiasm. . . . He embodies the ideal Ferdinand, full of passion in his tones and gestures."—*Op. cit.*, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup> St. James's, June 17.

was merciless to mine. Shakespeare was his personal enemy. I think I see him now, rubbing his fat fingers through his scanty hair, as he authoritatively delivered himself of this favourite remark: "*Hamlet*, sir? If *Hamlet* were produced to-morrow, *Hamlet* would be d—d, sir." After uttering that he would relapse into his chair, complacent, authoritative, obese.

I have since heard the remark from others, especially from actors, although, in *fact*, no play is so popular as *Hamlet*. It amuses thousands annually. It stimulates the minds of millions. Performed in barns, in minor theatres, and Theatres Royal, it always attracts. The lowest and most ignorant audiences delight in it; partly, no doubt, because of its profundity and sublimity—for the human soul can *feel* a grandeur which it cannot understand, and the dullest will listen with hushed awe and sympathy to those outpourings of a great meditative mind obstinately questioning fate and existence; to the lowest as the highest it is, *To be or not to be!* But *Hamlet* mainly delights the crowd by its wondrous dramatic and theatric art.

Consider for a moment the variety of its effects. The Ghost—the tyrannous murderer—the faithless wife and queen—the melancholy hero doomed to such an awful fate—the poor Ophelia, broken-hearted, and dying mad—the play within a play, entrapping the conscience of the King—the grave-diggers in ghastly mirth—the funeral of Ophelia, and the quarrel over her grave—and finally, the hurried bloody *dénouement*. Here are elements for several Fast dramas. Let us add thereto the passion and the poetry—let us note how Shakespeare by his art has made intensely interesting that which in other hands would have been insufferably tedious—I mean *Reverie*. *Hamlet* is a tragedy of thought; there is as much reflection as action in it. It



is the representation of a great *meditative* soul struggling against circumstance; and in this respect it is a theatrical paradox, for it makes Scepticism, Reverie, Reflection, *dramatic*. Here the *activity* of thought supplies the place of action, and hurries the audience along with it.

The peculiarity of *Hamlet* is its indissoluble union of refinement with horrors, of thought with tumult, of high and delicate poetry with gross theatrical effects. Only pause for a moment to consider the machinery of this play. What a tissue of horrors it is! the ghostly apparitions—the incestuous adultery and murder—Hamlet half mad—Ophelia raving mad—Polonius killed like a rat behind the arras—grave-diggers casting skulls upon the stage, and desecrating the churchyard with their ribaldry—a funeral interrupted by a furious quarrel between the two who loved the dead most dearly—murder planned—poisonings and stabbings to close this history,—and all these as the machinery for the most thoughtful and philosophic of poems! In this respect, as in so many others, it resembles *Faust*: that, also, is a poem wild, fantastic, brutal in its machinery; lofty, refined, and impassioned in its spirit.

I think, then, there is good reason for siding with fact against avuncular dogmatisms, and for declaring that *Hamlet* is not only a marvellous poem, but a great play. And this great play was performed here in London by the “great Germans,” who discovered Shakespeare, and who have taken out a patent for the correct appreciation of him. I have much to say on this hypothetical superiority of German appreciation; but for the present my business is with Herr Devrient, as the acknowledged Hamlet of Germany at this moment. The expectation raised was immense. Before venturing an opinion on the performance, it will be well to fix the point of view.



There are three capital aspects in the representation of Hamlet—1st, The princely elegance of a sorrowing, profoundly meditative man. 2nd, The fitful wildness of madness only half assumed. 3rd, The lover of Ophelia. On the first point there is no dispute. On the second and third points critics are not agreed. Now, did the occasion warrant it, I could prove Hamlet to be in such a state of cerebral excitement, that its outward manifestations should be those of madness, whether we consider him really mad or not; so that, as regards the actor, it matters very little what view he takes of this vexed question, he must depict the wildness and fitfulness proper to the scene, and not, as Charles Kean does, preserve the same settled gloom and contemplative quiet *after* the interview with the Ghost which served to express his mental condition *before* the interview.<sup>1</sup>

According to the view taken of Hamlet's madness, his demeanour towards Ophelia will be somewhat modified. That he loved her is clear enough; his treatment of her is not so clear if he were sane, though explicable upon the assumption of his derangement. At any rate, in their great scene there is a mingled tenderness and bitterness which affords the actor great scope: he should always *look* the contrary of what he utters, and his ferocity should have that restless wildness in it which would excuse it in her eyes. If he is assuming madness, he would wish her to believe him mad, and *so* interpret his harshness; if he is really mad, the wildness is natural.

I have thus established, as it were, some definite grounds of philosophic criticism on the representation of Hamlet.

<sup>1</sup> Lewes here reprints what he said of Charles Kean's Hamlet, from "At the opening of the play" (p. 108), to "are apparent in his acting" (p. 110).

Setting details aside, I call your attention to the three central points in the character: if the actor rightly seize them, we may pass over imperfections of detail; if he miss them, no excellence of detail will compensate. And now I am prepared to answer the question, How did Emil Devrient succeed in Hamlet? Indifferently. The princely elegance was never represented; indeed, I thought him ungainly, but those around me thought him graceful, so let him have the benefit of their admiration. The sorrowing of a profoundly meditative nature I caught no glimpse of; it was more like dyspepsia than sorrow, and as unlike meditation as it was unlike reality. In fact, the first scene was very inferior to that played by Charles Kean, who does represent the settled sorrow of Hamlet, if he represent little else. While, in his interview with the Ghost, Herr Devrient had more the demeanour of a frightened school-boy than of the sceptical student and affectionate son. Let me say, once for all, that I see no trace of superior intelligence in Emil Devrient's reading of his part, but very many evidences of careless, superficial interpretation, such as will bear no examination. There is too much of what may be called *haphazard emotion*—i.e., emotion not following a thorough study of identification with the character, but arising from a sort of guess at what should be the feeling of the moment. To give an example: He asks the players if they can perform a certain piece which he has in his eye, and moreover, if they will insert some dozen lines that he will write. I am ashamed to be forced into such an obvious remark as that Hamlet must be thoroughly aware of the peculiar *bearing* of the play he has chosen, and has already determined upon the use he will make of it to catch the conscience of the King; but I am forced to make the remark, because Herr Devrient, in the soliloquy which followed—

“O what a rogue and peasant slave am I,” etc.,

made a great point of suddenly conceiving this idea of using the play as a means of testing the King; he smacked his forehead, paused a long while, tried to throw speculation into his eyes, and in low, mysterious accents announced to himself this very determination. Now this is what I call haphazard emotion. The slightest consideration of the character as a *whole* will serve to exhibit repeated instances of the same kind. Of all characters on the stage, Hamlet most demands from its performer a subtle sympathy and an appreciation of intellect, which certainly are not with Herr Devrient's nature. Whatever else there may be in his acting, there is not intense mental vigour. Were it not that space and time are wanting, I would undertake to go through any scene, and point out proofs of what I say. Having, however, expressed my opinion with a frankness demanded by the occasion, and by the enormous praise which has greeted Herr Devrient, with more hospitality than discernment, let me now turn to what was excellent in his performance.

The second aspect which the character presents—viz., that of Hamlet half-mad, was forcibly given. Herr Devrient—probably according to German tradition—preserves the significant phrases addressed to the Ghost, “How now, old mole! dost work i' the earth so fast,” etc., and taking the plain hint given in such language, he represents the reason of Hamlet as completely unsettled by the revelations of the Ghost—he *is* the madman he affects to be. This one scene was sufficient to show that a new version of Hamlet, more consistent with the text, would be far more effective than our English versions. Herr Devrient was wild, fitful, and impressive. The change from the earlier manner was complete. Perhaps in the subsequent scenes a more

intelligent actor would have been less monotonous in his wildness; but, at any rate, it was something to see the mad view of the part seriously taken up. As Ophelia's lover—the third aspect of the part—Herr Devrient wanted tenderness altogether (he always does), but he played without the harshness which usually spoils this scene; and, indeed, it only wanted a little tenderness to make it perfect. The elegance, the pathos, the fluctuating passion, and the thought of Hamlet, were but poorly represented; but, on the other hand, the madness was thoroughly grasped; and very many of the speeches which one has been accustomed to hear ranted and mouthed, were spoken with a naturalness far more effective. To sum up in a phrase: Herr Devrient has not a spark of *genius*, but he is a practised actor, capable of giving effect to certain passages; and his Hamlet has some scenes one can honestly praise, though not one passage that roused any enthusiasm in me.<sup>1</sup>

The Polonius of Herr Limbach, on the contrary, was a fine piece of acting. He conceived Polonius rather as a stupid than a senile man, and in so far he erred, I think; nevertheless, this is almost hypercriticism on his excellent performance, which was admirable within its own limits. He was “made up” like a Vandyke; and the unconscious garrulity and feebleness of intellect were naïvely and quietly hit off.

### EMILIA GALOTTI.

June 26, 1852.

“I AM neither a dramatist nor a poet,” said the wise and

<sup>1</sup> Professor Morley says, “As a whole, Devrient's performance of Hamlet was most acceptable.”—*Op. cit.*, p. 50.

honest Lessing. "It is true, that people often do me the honour to account me the latter. But this is simply because they do not know me. From the few dramatic attempts I have made, so flattering a conclusion must not be drawn. It is not every one who takes a brush and daubs canvas, that can be called a painter. The earliest of these my attempts were written at that period of my life when facility is so readily mistaken for genius. And whatever is tolerable in my later attempts is, I am perfectly certain, owing to my critical judgment. I do not feel within me the living fountains bubbling upwards by their own force, and by their own force gushing out in pure, fresh, and sparkling streams. I am forced to pump out everything. I should be so cold, so poor, so short-sighted, had I not fortunately learned modestly to borrow the treasures of others, to warm myself by the fire of others, and to strengthen my eyesight by using the critical glasses of art. I am, therefore, always vexed and ashamed when I hear anything spoken against criticism. It is said to stifle genius; yet I flatter myself to have obtained something from it which comes very near genius. I am one of the lame, and cannot consent to hear crutches vilified."

Brave, and honest, and modest words, which could only come from so great and truthful a man as that most British of Germans—Gotthold Ephraim Lessing! I think Schiller might have said the same; for—you will hate me for the heresy—he seems to me not a whit more of a dramatist, and only something more of a poet, than Lessing. He had more poetic enthusiasm and sensitiveness, perhaps a more delicate delight in beauty, but he was scarcely more of the *born singer* than Lessing was. However, that heresy is too great to be argued here, and *Emilia Galotti* demands attention.



I do not agree with the Germans in ranking *Emilia Galotti* above *Minna von Barnhelm*, which “comes very near genius;” but it has certain decided merits, and being a German classic, its production, on Saturday [June 19], was proper, although the effect was immensely wearisome—greatly owing to the bad acting. *Emilia Galotti* is a modernised form of the story of *Virginius*, and I must express my surprise at the mistake into which Lessing, the admirable critic, has fallen in this critical play, viz.—transplanting a story, essentially Roman in its motives, to a modern Italian principality, he has forgotten that the motives become false by the change of time and place. That Virginius should slay his daughter to preserve her from *slavery*, is quite consistent with Roman feelings; but that Odoardo should slay his daughter to save her from being dishonoured, moved thereto by her entreaties, is not within the range of modern sympathy. The modern father would kill the prince, not his daughter; the modern daughter would kill herself, she would never bid her father stain his hands with her blood.

The story moves slowly, otherwise it is dramatically evolved. The characters are drawn with clear, sharp outlines, well contrasted. The weak vacillating Prince, eager to profit by Marinelli’s villainies, yet afraid to meet the consequences—prone to crime, yet throwing the blame on others—signing a death warrant with the same levity as if it were a *billet doux*—is capitally studied. But Herr Grans gave a most stagey and ungainly representation of it. Marinelli—the original of Wurm in *Kabale und Liebe*; and the Countess Orsina—the original of the Princess Eboli, in *Don Carlos*—are both admirably drawn. Herr Kühn was quiet and effective in the one, Frau Flindt wholly incompetent to the other. Herr Lehfeld murdered Odoardo,



before he murdered his daughter. A word of praise, however, to Herr Noetel, for his picturesque make-up as the Brigand ; and nothing but praise for the quiet, gentlemanly, dignified performance of Appiani, by Herr Emil Devrient, who has only one scene, but played it more thoroughly, to my taste, than anything he has yet done. The truth is, *emotion* lies beyond Herr Devrient's capacity. Give him a scene in which his handsome person, quiet manner, and beautiful delivery of the text are untroubled by any of the intenser demands of passion, and he is admirable.

### FAUST.<sup>1</sup>

June 26, 1852.

OF this, incomparably the greatest poem of modern times, I have so much I wish to say that I will say nothing because I cannot say all.

And yet, on second thoughts, I *will* allude to the immense variety and dramatic interest of the scenes which it contains. Every one knows how truly it presents the eternal problem of our intellectual life ; but no one seems to have been distinctly aware of how truly it reflects the varied lineaments of our social life. *Faust* is at once a problem and a picture : the problem embracing questions of universal importance ; the picture representing all classes, all sentiments, all passions. The great problem of life is stated in all its nudity, the picture of life is painted in all its variety.

But *Faust*, as Goethe wrote it, is one thing, and *Faust*, as the Germans performed it on Tuesday, is another. I say

<sup>1</sup> St. James's, June 22, "This evening will be produced (for the first time in this country) Goethe's *chef d'œuvre* of *Faust*."

nothing of the arrangement, alterations, transpositions, and abbreviations of the piece, every line of which has its place: I say nothing of the miserable attempts at representing what *might*, in such a theatre as the Lyceum, have been a beautiful and imposing spectacle; I confine myself to the German acting, which was accepted as excellent *because* German. The first remark I have to make is, on the vulgarisation of this great poem by the want of poetry in the actors. It was an Adelphi version of *Faust* without "Adelphi effects." Herr Emil Devrient as Faust settled for ever in my eyes his claims as an actor. His merits I have already ungrudgingly admitted; but that he is an *actor* I feel compelled most distinctly to deny. In the first place, he is commonplace in *conception*; in the second place, his face and voice are incapable of *expression*. Fine as the voice is, and beautiful the accent of his German, there are none of those exquisite modulations which give music to verse and passionate vibration to eloquence; nor does the face supply the want, for it is as immovable as Charles Kean's. These are not matters of opinion, they are facts. Even his admirers admit them, but seek refuge in "Ah! well, for all that he is a fine actor."

In *Faust* he had a part requiring both thoughtfulness and passion. In the earlier scenes, instead of the thought-wearied student—"air-galloping and questioning the sun," as Aristophanes says of Socrates—instead of the despairing, baffled Faust, we had an ordinary necromancer stalking about the stage, declaiming divine verses with no sense of their divinity. In the subsequent scenes, when the dust of folios is shaken off, and with it all the weariness of life—when he has entered upon passionate life—we had a handsome man, beautifully dressed, gesticulating like a tenor singer, and *feeling* not at all. I ask any one who

has seen him play Egmont and Faust, if they could discover any distinct individuality in these parts? Was not Egmont very like Faust? The same tones, the same gestures, the same look? I ask any one who may have watched him during those exquisite love-scenes with Gretchen, whether there was a pulse of passion, a look or gesture of tenderness, a glimpse of the lover, beyond what tenors are accustomed to exhibit over the footlights? I ask any one who watched the last scene, whether tone, look, or gesture betrayed the slightest agony deeper than the most conventional of stage agonies? It is necessary to specify these things, for I find myself in a minority as regards the press and the public; yet when I put direct questions to his admirers I can only get evasive answers, or admission of the very charges I allege.

Herr Kühn played Mephistopheles, but his conception of the part was vulgar, commonplace, and directly opposed to the distinct indications given by Goethe. He made it a bit of German *diablerie*—a sarcastic Zamiel. Now, Goethe laughs at the idea of the modern devil not being a perfect gentleman:—

“Auch die Cultur, die alle Welt beleckt  
Hat auf den Teufel sich erstreckt  
Das nordische Phantom ist nun nicht mehr zu schauen.”

Culture has robbed the devil of hoofs and horns, and made him a *Herr Baron*!

“Ich bin ein Cavalier, wie andre Cavaliere!”

The devilish nature is exhibited in moral not in physical signs; in unbelief, in want of sympathy, in mocking sarcasm, in icy coldness. The proper Mephistopheles is that Satan in patent leather boots, of which we had so

marvellous a picture in Charles Mathew's well-dressed scoundrel in *The Day of Reckoning*.<sup>1</sup>

Not only does Herr Kühn's conception depart from the plain meaning of Goethe as regards Mephistopheles, but it robs the poem of that profound and exquisite touch of Gretchen's distrust of her lover's friend. No one but this innocent girl perceives anything in Mephistopheles to shudder at. But she reads on his forehead that he has no sympathy with anything. Innocence instinctively knows and recoils from the Spirit who Denies. As Herr Kühn dresses and plays the part, the remark is an absurdity, no human being could for a moment believe him to be an ordinary mortal. Fiend is written in every line; and not only Gretchen, but Martha and the jovial citizens in *Auerbach's Keller*, ought to turn from him in horror.<sup>2</sup>

Waiving this fundamental objection, however, let me say that, as a realisation of his conception, Herr Kühn's performance was admirable. His "make-up" is always that of an artist, and many parts of his acting were deservedly applauded; notably that glorious scene with the student. Herr Kühn, in my opinion, is by far the best actor of the troop. Fraulein Schaefer was not the Gretchen we all love, but many parts of her performance were good, and on the whole it was a great improvement upon her Ophelia.

The house was crammed to suffocation; the boxes and stalls adorned by an unusual display of aristocracy, natal and intellectual. On the stairs, in coming out, my ears were startled by the sound—"Mrs. Vivian's carriage." Mrs. Vivian? "Am I married?" the thought passed

<sup>1</sup> See p. 122.

<sup>2</sup> "Herr Kühn is possibly the greatest villain on the European stage. . . . He has thought calmly and philosophised much over his Mephistopheles."—Professor Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

shudderingly across my mind; but a deep and soothing sense of satisfaction suffused itself through me as I recovered my self-consciousness and found it was *not* so! And if there were no other cause of satisfaction at finding myself ("much virtue in an *if*!") a bachelor, I should have felt it when the most exquisite of violet eyes in the world looked down upon me, and a voice said—"Remember! the day Vivian marries I give up the *Leader*!" *Ah! soyez tranquille!*

## GERMAN PLAYS AND ACTORS.

July 3, 1852.

THE season closed with the second representation of *Faust* on Tuesday last [June 29]. Whatever deductions criticism may have made, the public has nothing but gratitude to Mr. Mitchell for his venture in this direction. As the *Times* truly said, these performances were not regarded in the light of dramatic entertainments so much as of literary entertainments. People wanted to see on the stage the works they were familiar with in the study.

Now as I, personally, had no such desire, having lived five times in Germany, and seen there much finer acting than that at the St. James's Theatre, you may perhaps understand how my criticisms were naturally of a less enthusiastic tone than that of my brothers, and how my enjoyment being mitigated by mediocrity of acting, I did not blaze away in fireworks of *enthusymusy*. I was considerably bored; and only the natural meekness of my disposition prevented me from a fierce onslaught.

Nevertheless, to you, *Lector Benevole*, I owe some explanation of the attitude taken in this matter. The press generally sided with the public, and proclaimed *that* to be fine acting which I emphatically declared to be mediocre.



There is a strong *prima facie* presumption that I was wrong. And yet of course I think the other side was wrong. Can this be reconciled?

It is not an insult to the public to say that appreciation of good acting is very rare, owing to the difficulty of separating the pleasure derived from the play itself, and the pleasure derived from the actor's share. The public is pleased, and cares not why. Hence it is that no man altogether fails in Hamlet.<sup>1</sup> The character so interests the audience that they credit the actor with the pleasure they receive. But critics whose business it is to understand the *technical* part, and to separate from the character what belongs to the actor,—in other words, to judge of the *means* employed by the actor to *represent* what the dramatist has written,—are bound not to accept the will for the deed, conventionalisms for truths, traditions for ideas. When Faust says to Gretchen, "Let this look and this hand-pressure express what is inexpressible," the public hearing Emil Devrient utter the words, think only of what is *meant*, and take expression for granted; but the critic whose eyes are open sees that Emil Devrient, in uttering the words, does not press her hand, and instead of looking into the depths of her eyes with love's searching tenderness, looks calmly over her head; and the open-eyed critic pronounces that bad acting.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This remark has been commonly attributed to Macready—it occurs in his *Reminiscences* near the beginning of Chapter VII. Lewes and he may of course have made the observation independently of each other, or Macready may unconsciously have recalled Lewes's remark. He began to write his *Reminiscences* in 1855.

<sup>2</sup> "Herr Emil Devrient has confirmed for himself easily, in England, the reputation that he had acquired in Germany. Admirers of spasm may not always appreciate his purity of taste, and may miss some points because they are not prodded into them."—Professor Morley, *op. cit.*, p. 53.



Any one accustomed to criticise acting, not simply to enjoy it but to *understand* it, and *also* accustomed to German acting, would I believe agree with me in the estimate I have formed of Emil Devrient. And there is more in the second clause than at once meets the eye. To those unfamiliar with German acting all the conventionalisms of the stage are fresh, and pass for truths. Doubtless a German who first sees on our stage the rollicking Irishman press his walking-stick on the gouty toe of the humorous Father, or playfully digging his elbow into the intercostal spaces of the jocose Uncle, thinks the fun immense! To us the joke is worn out. How much this operates, aided by the inevitable ignorance of national expression which foreigners must labour under, may be seen in the absurd estimation in which bad French actors are held here and in Germany. That the French have a number of admirable, inimitable actors, we all know; but that they have also deplorably bad actors is equally certain, and many of these bad actors I have heard the frequenters of the St. James's theatre pronounce superior to our really good actors. It is the same with the German. Had the troop gathered together by Mr. Mitchell been English actors, their mediocrity would have been apparent from the first. Of Emil Devrient I have so often expressed my opinion that I need not revert to it. Herr Kühn is decidedly an excellent actor of villains—the artist of the troop. Herr Schrader is the best fop I have seen, and his “first actor” in *Hamlet* was a remarkable bit. Herr Limbach is a good quiet humorist. The comic actors have decidedly the superiority; as they always have, for laughter is not critical.

## MASKS AND FACES.

November 27, 1852.

Go and see *Masks and Faces*,<sup>1</sup> for several reasons. You will be amused: that is something. Laughter and the tears of sympathy alternate through the varying scene; bright ingenious dialogue, playing like lambent flame, stimulates the intellect; and homely pathos, homely mirth, kind hearts and loving voices, gently touch the various chords of emotion.

But there are other reasons why you should go. You should go if you are a dramatist or dramatic critic, to learn there the secrets of success and failure. You should go if you are a lover of acting, to learn how truly and artistically Webster,<sup>2</sup> Leigh Murray, Mrs. Stirling, and Mrs. Leigh Murray can speak behind the Mask when a real Persona is afforded them.

I am not going to tell you the story of this comedy. You have seen or will see it. In the long scene of the second act,<sup>3</sup> where the poor poet is writing his comedy, with a starving family for inspiration, and tears for gaiety—in that touching scene, I say, the dramatic critic will learn the secrets of success and failure. It succeeds because it has the elements of eternal success—character and emotion: the sharpness and individuality of the well-contrasted characters, and the unmistakable reality of the emotion arising out of true circumstance, not artificially brought in

<sup>1</sup> Haymarket, Saturday, November 20.

<sup>2</sup> Benjamin Webster (1798-1882) was manager of the Haymarket from 1837 to 1853, when he became manager of the Adelphi. He retired from the stage in 1874.

<sup>3</sup> It was originally played in two acts.

for the sake of effect. But then, beside this quality, so precious on the stage and elsewhere, there is a deficiency—felt more on the stage, but felt everywhere—a deficiency of organic construction. All the details of that scene are admirable; and they do *illustrate* the characters of the poor poet, his sick wife, his children, the kind Peg Woffington, and the empty Connoisseurs of Art—but they do no more. They afford the actors good material—they are not built up into a work of art. It is a portfolio of sketches, not a picture. Hence it requires all the resources of the actors to keep up the interest; and even in spite of our laughter and our tears, a sense of weariness ever and anon steals over us. I point out this scene as a study.

Webster surpassed himself in Triplet, the poor poet, painter, and actor. There was an abashed seediness of manner, only half covering the glimmering vanity and hope which shone beneath, as the fire shines through the ashes—a radiant confidence in his own genius, which neglect and failure might sadden, but could not suppress—a contrast between the visionary splendour of hopes formed in the twilight of reverie, which magnifies all things, and the actual poverty which was breaking his heart for the dear ones at the fireless hearth; in a word, there was a picture of the poor poet, such as the stage has never seen before—the eye lighting up its signal of contradiction to the seedy dress and starved sallowness of complexion. In his first scene, where his tragedies are rejected, and where Peg Woffington melts him with her kindness, he was less obviously but as truly a fine actor than in the garret scene, which is more effective on the stage. But go and see him, I say again, and note at the same time the delicate *nuances* with which Leigh Murray<sup>1</sup> varies his coxcombs. In *Money*, he plays a quiet,

<sup>1</sup> Henry Leigh Murray (1821-1870) was a famous *jeune premier*.

selfish coxcomb; in *The Foundlings*,<sup>1</sup> he is inimitable as a good-natured coxcomb, just stepped from the Guard's Club; in *Masks and Faces*, he plays a selfish, but clever, cold, and unscrupulous coxcomb, who is a fine gentleman because he is thrown among fine gentlemen, but whose quiet self-mastery and steady intellect imply that he is capable of playing a part in the world. For gentlemanly ease of bearing and truth of elocution, quiet as effective, I commend this to your notice. If he will step aside with me a moment, I will just whisper that he makes rather too frequent use of the snuff-box; but that is the only fault, and a slight one.

Mrs. Stirling has not for a long while had a part which shows her off to such advantage, and she evidently resolved not to let a bit of it slip through her fingers. She was gay, natural, touching, loving, throughout, and made one perfectly understand Ernest Vane's infatuation, though *not* his subsequent desertion of her for his wife. There must be some extraordinary charm in "conjugal love"—some intense fascination in legal happiness which has hitherto escaped my observation; or else no man could possibly, with forty parsons' power of morality, think of quitting such a Peg Woffington for such a Mrs. Vane!<sup>2</sup> I must marry, and find out that secret! If I do marry, beloved reader! (I shan't; but I put the extreme hypothesis,) I will tell you all about it; isn't that my function in this majestic universe,—to tell you "all about" everything?

<sup>1</sup> A "comic drama" adapted from the French by Buckstone (Haymarket, June 16, 1852), in which Leigh Murray played "the mincing and empty-headed Greatrakes."

<sup>2</sup> "Mrs. Stirling has all the benefit of contrast in the girlish, effusive manner which is very prettily assumed by Miss Rose Bennett in the character of Mrs. Vane."—*Times*, November 22, 1852. Miss Bennett made her début early in October in *The Road to Ruin*.

I forgot to tell you about Mrs. Leigh Murray ; but I will not close without a line directing your attention to the truthfulness and pathos with which she plays a very small part, but a part which so many would have *over-played*.

## FAIRY-LAND AT THE LYCEUM.

*January 1, 1853.*

LAST week you were informed, in brief and somewhat enigmatical manner, of my deep seclusion "in the still air of delightful studies"; I am alone with my folios—companied by The Fathers! Those mysterious characters, of which Fanny complains, were meant to tell you that. Basil was speaking to me in somewhat inelegant Greek of the advantages to be derived from the study of Greek writers<sup>1</sup>—if I have *not* gained all the wisdom there awaiting me, I am willing to suppose the fault was mine: perhaps I did not come "prepared with the due humility of spirit," and receptivity of intellect! Whatever the cause may be, certain it is that when Fanny, with the dove-like eyes, declared I must take her to the Lyceum to see the Christmas piece, I quitted my folios with immense alacrity!

I must borrow hyperboles to express something of the admiring delight with which we witnessed the *Good Woman in the Wood*;<sup>2</sup> ordinary epithets have so lost their value by the prodigal use made of them in criticism, that to speak within bounds would be speaking coldly and inaccurately.

<sup>1</sup> See Introduction, p. xxix.

<sup>2</sup> During the Vestris-Mathews management of the Lyceum Planché was the regular author of the Christmas and Easter pieces, and William Beverley was the scene-painter. This piece was produced December 27, 1852.



The Greeks would have boldly spoken of the *flabbergastuality* of this piece, but our poorer language is denied those reaches of genius! The Lyceum itself affords no standard of comparison. Never on any stage was there a scene of such enchantment and artistic beauty as that which concludes the first act of this piece, the *Basaltic Terminus on the Borders of Lake Lucid*. To say that in the long summer afternoons of reverie-peopled boyhood one had dreamed of fairy-land like this, would be to say that the wide-wandering fancy of a boy was equal to that of a Beverley; but Beverley is the fairy's own child; he *must* be a changeling; his childhood was spent among those regions, and now, in his serious and laborious manhood, the dim remembrances of that far-off splendour haunt his soul.

“ The pansy at his feet  
Doth the same tale repeat :  
Whither is fled the visionary gleam ?  
Where is it now, the glory and the dream ? ”

Where is it? In his artist soul! and ever and ever does that soul strive to re-create it to the eye. *There* lies the mystery of that pale delicate face! “Trailing clouds of glory,” he moves amongst us, environed by mystery, because he cannot

“ Forget the glories he hath known,  
And that imperial palace whence he came ! ”

He is sad, thoughtful, pale, delicate, because of

“ Those shadowy recollections  
Which, be they what they may,  
Are yet the fountain-light of all his day,  
Are yet a master-light of all his seeing.”



The fairies have had millions of worshippers, hundreds of poets, and one supreme artist, and that artist is William Beverley! In this *Good Woman in the Wood* there are several beautiful scenes, and the last scene—always a Lyceum marvel—is as marvellous as anything which former years have shown us; but, to my mind, the highest reach of scenic art is that closing scene of the first act.

The piece itself is better than usual, everywhere agreeable, often funny as well as fairy-like, with some capital writing—neat, easy, punning, and epigrammatic; several excellent songs and concerted pieces; an exquisitely grouped ballet, with Rosina Wright, the first of English dancers, moving amid the groups in her bright, graceful witchery; costumes of perfect taste and varied splendour, and, as I hinted before, a general *flabbergastuality*, not expressible in moderate English. I laughed, I applauded, I shouted inordinate “Ohs!” of breath-suspending admiration; and demeaned myself, generally, like a boy at his first play, instead of the languid critic, “used up” by seeing so many pieces with “nothing in them.”<sup>1</sup>

Don’t expect me to tell you anything of the piece. Enough if I say how charming it was and how excellently acted. Madame Vestris, to whose taste the public owes so much (and cheerfully acknowledges the debt!) had a capital part in *Dame Goldenheart*, and played it as if she liked it. She was in wonderful voice. Julia St. George<sup>2</sup> improves with every new part, though I must whisper a word to her in confidence (like a stage aside) *not* to over-

<sup>1</sup> The catchword of Sir Charles Coldstream in *Used Up*, one of Charles Mathews’ most popular characters.

<sup>2</sup> Julia St. George made her first appearance at the Lyceum, December 26, 1849, in Planché’s *Island of Jewels*. She had previously played Ariel in *The Tempest*, under Phelps’s management, at Sadler’s Wells.

load her head with such a profusion of curls; she has not height to carry such a mass. Miss Robertson<sup>1</sup> made her first appearance, and a very pretty appearance she made, so as to justify Prince Almond's passion both by her sweet looks and her sweet voice. Miss Wyndham made a very pretty princess, and Miss Eglinton a seductive prince. A word also for Miss Ellis, who looked queenly, and played a small part with the nicest possible discrimination. Frank Matthews<sup>2</sup> as King Bruin was perfect: his savage tragedy, his dignity, and his terror, kept the house "roaring." The *tone* was consistent, and kept within the bounds of burlesque. Altogether I declare I have not seen such a fairy piece as this. The triumvirate—Vestris, Planché, Beverley (let no classical gentleman raise his eyebrows at the *vir*)—have opened Fairyland: who is there will not take a peep?

## OPENING OF THE FRENCH PLAYS.

February 5, 1853.

THERE is no theatre I so thoroughly enjoy as the St. James's,<sup>3</sup> when Mr. Mitchell invites us there with his gay troupe of French comedians. In the first place, one meets "everybody" there. You know what a small circle "everybody" makes in London! In the next place, you are so *en famille*, that you are enabled to note, with pleased astonishment, that a grave important person—*un homme*

<sup>1</sup> This was Miss Agnes Robertson, afterwards Mrs. Dion Boucicault.

<sup>2</sup> Frank Matthews (1807-1871) was an excellent comedian.

<sup>3</sup> The season opened Monday, January 31.

*sérieux*—like Viscount Noodle, or the great Potts, “of the firm of Potts, Pans, & Co.,” unbends to gracious laughter just like an ordinary mortal; and you begin to think, “after all, laughter may not be so frivolous.” Moreover, there is young Lord Boodle, who, although in a drawing-room he scarcely raises his voice above a languid whisper, deems himself bound—*noblesse oblige*!—to talk *louder* than the actors, and the polite audience is too well bred to shout “Turn him out.” This is so gratifying to us snobs! we actually hear the opinions of that well-bred young nobleman! we hear his voice! we catch the verdict! we are saved the trouble of criticism, for he assures us that “Wavel is weally capital; so vewy dwoll! But the piece is twash—oh! damn it, twash, and no mistake!”

Nor is this the only criticism we hear. Lady Dawdle, who is ancient and not handsome, and whose views of the French language seem to be imperfect, to judge by the few phrases we hear, tells us in a loud voice while waiting in the crush room, “We have no actors like the French!” This criticism I hear till patience is exhausted, and I don’t think Lady Dawdle is handsome enough to reconcile me to it. Let us understand the matter. As a general rule, French actors are certainly better than ours. But the French stage can show no actors superior to Charles Mathews, Keeley or Mrs. Keeley (I stop there, lest, if I went further, it should look invidious). I know the French stage well, and greatly enjoy it, but three such actors in their peculiar departments it does not possess. Then, as to the general run of actors we have over here, only a very unskilful eye could fail to distinguish every variety of badness in them; they are better taught than ours, and have at home a more critical and exacting public; but in

intelligence and feeling, they are as conventional as ours, with this difference in their favour, *that English audiences are not aware of these conventionalisms*, so that what is really commonplace passes for excellence. St. Marie, Langeval, Tourillon, and others of our troupe are bad actors, and only seem good actors to those who want a proper standard of comparison.

It was the same with the German troupe. You may remember how coldly I spoke of Devrient and the others, and how enthusiastically the public and the press received them. I then hinted that the reason was because our public could not discriminate between the foreigner and the actor. Well, what I then said has since received a striking illustration. An English troop of unnamed unnameable actors has been playing in various parts of Germany, and Mr. Ira Aldridge,<sup>1</sup> the African, has been the Othello of this troop. Most of you know pretty well what sort of actor *he* is thought to be in England; nevertheless, he has been received with immense applause, and the papers pronounce him a first-rate Shakespearian actor! Now, I do not say that Devrient is of the same rank as Ira Aldridge, but I do say that if we in England could judge of him as intimately as we can Aldridge, we should say very little about him.

“But all this has nothing to do with Ravel and the new pieces?” *Vous croyez?* It has *this* to do with them,—that I choose to make it the preface; surely a man may write what preface he likes? My pen runs on like that of “an agreeable rattle,” and if you don’t care to follow it, skip!

<sup>1</sup> Ira Aldridge, the “African Roscius” (1804-1867), was a gentleman of colour, and seems to have been a fair tragedian of the robustious order.

Ravel<sup>1</sup> and the new pieces? Well, they are outrageously amusing, and none the less so for being of the farce farcical. I was going to tell you in detail why I like the French plays so much; but as you object to digressions, and think my office is to confine myself to the matter in hand (as if a digression were not equally a matter in hand!), I refrain. I curb my Pegasus. I clip the wide-wandering wings of Fancy. I become a reporter.

*Un Monsieur qui suit les femmes*<sup>2</sup> shows us a young gentleman of adventurous and amatory turn of mind, whose passion and whose business is to follow every pretty woman he sees, and, if possible, to make her acquaintance, not with strictly matrimonial views. One of his persecuted charmers, after a long pursuit, relents, invites him to accompany her home, presents him to her husband and guests as the gentleman whom she has not the pleasure of knowing. This was a very ingenious turn, and promised great fun; the promise was kept as far as Ravel was concerned, but the incidents of the denouement were stagey and not amusing.

*York* is a Palais Royal farce, very laughable, *un peu risquée*, and not over probable: but laughter stuns criticism, and I am ashamed to say how much I laughed. Ravel is not only a droll, he is an *actor*. He represents *character*. The humour with which he represents it, the farce with which he embroiders it, may make one at first forgetful of

<sup>1</sup> Pierre-Alfred Ravel (1814-1881) was the successor of Arnal, and a light comedian of the Charles Mathews type. (See Lewes's paper on Mathews in *Actors and Acting*.) Ravel was the original of several of Labiche's chief characters, such as Ferdinand in *Le Chapeau de Paille d'Italie*, and Edgard in *Edgard et sa Bonne*.

<sup>2</sup> An adaptation of this vaudeville had been produced at the Strand, under the title of *Kensington Gardens*.



the substantial truth there is in his personation. But compare his performance in *Un Monsieur que suit les femmes* with that in *York*, and you will observe how differently he embodies different characters. Let me not forget to point your attention to Emma Fleury,<sup>1</sup> the débutante; she is very young, apparently not more than seventeen, but she is natural, intelligent, pretty, and gives promise of becoming an actress.

### MACBETH: AND HOW THE KEANS PERFORMED IT.

February 19, 1853.

I SHOULD like to write an essay on *Macbeth*,<sup>2</sup> but journalistic necessities compel me to confine myself to the two leading characters, and of them to speak only in hints.

Macbeth himself admits of two different conceptions. He may be represented as "bloody, bold, and resolute"—a border chieftain in a turbulent and incult period—a man of the dark ages, rushing onwards with reckless impetuosity—murdering his royal host—seizing the crown, and accomplishing his *coup d'état* without respect to persons. In this view, all the metaphysical meshes which entangle him would be but the excuses of his conscience, or the instruments used to serve his purpose; they would be to him what "Socialism" and "saving society" were to that more ignoble usurper who snatched a crown in 1852. I do not think this the Shakespearian Macbeth; but I think it is a

<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Emma Fleury, born 1834, entered the Théâtre-Français in 1856, but did not attain any great distinction.

<sup>2</sup> *Macbeth*, "as played at Windsor Castle by Royal Command," was produced at the Princess's, Monday, February 14.



conception of the character which might be very dramatic and effective. The other and the truer conception would represent a wild, rude, heroic nature, hurried by his passions into crime, but great even in crime—severed from the rectilinear path of honour by the horrible suggestions of the Witches coming upon him in the flush and exaltation of victory, and playing on his active imagination, making him its slave. For Macbeth is distinctively a bold soldier, and a man of most impressible imagination. He is intensely superstitious: in those days all men were, but the imaginative were so to an inordinate degree. He *sees* a dagger in the air; he *hears* the sleeper say, "Macbeth doth murder sleep; Macbeth shall sleep no more."<sup>1</sup> He tells us how

"The time has been my senses would have cool'd  
To hear a night-shriek; and my fell of hair  
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir  
As life were in't."

(By the way, is "fell of hair" the correct phrase, and what can it mean? May one not suggest "fall of hair"—*i.e.*, the hair which naturally falls on his shoulders would rise up in horror.<sup>2</sup>) So that when the Witches prophesy

<sup>1</sup> *Macb.* Methought I heard a voice cry, *Sleep no more!*  
*Macbeth does murder sleep; . . .*  
Still it cried, *Sleep no more!* to all the house:  
*Glamis hath murder'd sleep: and therefore Cawdor*  
*Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!*

Act ii., Sc. 2.

<sup>2</sup> The following week (February 26) Lewes wrote: "What a thing it is not to know Anglo-Saxon! Last week, in the rapidity of a parenthesis, I questioned whether Macbeth's 'fell of hair' was the correct phrase. A correspondent tells me that my query was absurd, for the word *fell* is a good Anglo-Saxon imitation of the Latin *pellis*, and means skin or covering." Another correspondent referred him to Corin's excuse for the shepherds not saluting hands, because "we

that he shall be king, he is moved deeply, his active imagination shaping possibilities—

“ My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,  
Shakes so my single state of man, that function  
Is smothered in surmise.”

But Banquo, to whom the greatness of a line of kings is promised, is not moved at all, disbelieves, in fact, the diabolical suggestion. Thus, we see, Macbeth is represented as more imaginative than the common run of men. He is good, too; full of the milk of human kindness. He would be great, is not without ambition, but is without the illness which should attend it. He desires highly, but would win holily. He has a moral conscience. And here lies the tragedy. He is no common murderer; he is criminal because great temptations overcome great struggles; the tragic collision of antagonistic principles—Ambition and Conscience—take him from the records of vulgar crime, and raise him into a character fitly employed by Art. One might enlarge here upon the manner in which Shakespeare's own intense reflectiveness is allowed to shine through his varied creations. He cannot even take this wild, feudal chief, without making him nearly as metaphysical as Hamlet. I hint this view, and pass on.

All through the play we see him as one made irresolute

are still handling our ewes, and their fells, you know, are greasy.” “ So you see,” Lewes continues, “ I made an ass of myself—*mais que voulez-vous ?* I can't know everything ! I don't read the *Eyrbyggja Saga*, and have only once seen, never read, Xiphilin ! Ah ! that Xiphilin ! If I had but burnt the midnight oil over his pages, what *lead* I could aggravate my sandals with ! and how the public would look up to me ! ‘ Vivian frivolous, indeed ; why, he reads Xiphilin ! ’ And I'll trouble you for the reverence which would follow such a remark.”

by conscience, but resolute and terrible in act—when roused to action—because his nature is that of a brave onrushing soldier. His hands once reddened by murder, he pursues with vigour the murderer's career. He is bold, even in the very face of his superstition. What though Birnam wood *be* come to Dunsinane, and what though Macduff be not of woman born, the soldier fights like a desperate man, defiant of the metaphysical terrors that shake him !

Does Charles Kean represent either of these characters ? He does not. He cannot be said to take any view of the *character* at all ; he tries to embody the various feelings of each situation ; taking, however, the literal and unintelligent interpretation, so that almost every phase of the character is falsified. We see neither the gallant soldier, nor the imaginative man. His bearing is neither warrior-like nor reflective. The wondrous touches with which Shakespeare illuminates the character are all slurred over by him. When the witches accost him, his only expression of " metaphysical influence " is to stand still with his eyes fixed and his mouth open, in the way you know. The *fluctuating* emotions which Macbeth must be undergoing all that time, are expressed by a *fixed* stare. And the profound art of Shakespeare, shown in Macbeth's *tentative* appeals to Banquo—avoiding all mention of what the witches promised him, yet trying to get at Banquo's thoughts by alluding to Banquo's children—these touches, which an actor of intelligence could not, one would think, fail to make impressive, are passed over by Charles Kean, as if they were ordinary lines of the text. As a palpable illustration of his unintelligent reading of the character, let me refer to what I have before called his *literal* interpretation (it is of that kind which always supposes that the word " tears "

must be uttered in a tearful voice). In the famous dagger soliloquy, will it be credited that he does not rise to a crescendo of horrible amazement at the words—

“Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going!”

but at the superfluous fact that—

“Such an instrument I was to use;”

and again he flies into a paroxysm of horror at seeing “on its blade and dudgeon gouts of blood.” Now, considering that he has already determined on murdering Duncan, and the dagger has marshalled him the way, the horror at gouts of blood is ludicrous; the horror is the parent, not the child of this blood; it precedes, it does not succeed it. Let me call attention to one egregious and constant mistake Charles Kean commits in this as in other parts—viz., the alternation of explosive rant with calmness. One moment he is ranting till his voice is hoarse, and the next he is as quiet as a melancholy recluse. Now every one knows that even in the subsidence of rage there is peculiar agitation; and although the voice may be low, its tones are tremulous.

In Charles Kean's *Macbeth* all the tragedy has vanished; sympathy is impossible, because the mind of the criminal is hidden from us. He makes *Macbeth* ignoble—one whose crime is that of a common murderer, with perhaps a tendency towards Methodism.<sup>1</sup>

I believe my readers by this time are pretty well assured of my impartiality, and that the opinions I utter are irrespective of personal considerations; they may be erroneous, but they are mine. Moreover, I have praised Charles Kean

<sup>1</sup> Westland Marston, a warm friend of Kean's, criticises his *Macbeth* quite as unfavourably, if not as bitterly, as Lewes. See his *Recollections*, vol. i., pp. 174, 175.

enough on other occasions to be allowed, without suspicion, to say how poor his performance of Macbeth seems to me. And for that opinion I have assigned the reasons. If any one seeing Macbeth can discover in Charles Kean either the heroic soldier or the imaginative man; if he can say that the reading of the character as a whole, or of individual passages, was such as embodied the plain text, then let what I have written go for nothing.

Let me add, however, that bad as the performance was, it had fine points. The weariness of guilt was tragically, and even imaginatively, portrayed; the terror after the deed *was* terror, although I think it had more the aspect of a house-breaker's fear of the police than of Macbeth's agitated conscience; and the desperation at the close *was* desperation.<sup>1</sup> At times Charles Kean does things so well, that one is at a loss to conceive how it is he can have been acting fine parts so many years, and yet fall short of what every one demands in a Shakespearian character.

It is now some twenty years since Mrs. Charles Kean first attempted the character of Lady Macbeth in London. She was then a charming actress of comedy and the lighter parts of tragedy; her very charmingness was an obstacle to her representation of Lady Macbeth, according to the received notion in England; and she failed in it. I do not remember her performance; but I suspect that it was much better than the public, accustomed to the Siddons type, would accept. Indeed, I am very much of Mrs. Siddons's opinion, that Lady Macbeth was a fair, delicate, *womanly* woman; capable of great "valour of the tongue"; capable of nerving herself for any one great object, but showing by her subsequent remorse and broken heart that she had been

<sup>1</sup> Westland Marston says he carried away the audience by the "pluck" of his acting in the last scene.



*playing* a part. Be this as it may, Mrs. Charles Kean was not successful then, and is successful now. I do not accept her view of the part, but at any rate she *has* a view, and realises it with a vulture-like ferocity. In no scene was she weak; in the sleep-walking scene she was terrific.<sup>1</sup>

It is not, however, so much the acting as the "getting up" of Macbeth which will attract the public. In some respects the *mise en scène* is worthy of loud praise, and makes one almost forget the bad taste of the play-bill, whereof a whole page is devoted to an exposition of the authorities of the costumes adopted. Charles Mathews has set a wretched example, and one may now expect all managers to make the play-bill a fly-sheet of criticism and erudition, unless a little timely ridicule warn them of their danger. Charles Kean makes a formidable display; talks familiarly of Diodorus Siculus, Pliny, Strabo, Xiphilin, and the Eyrbyggja Saga. Xiphilin! he read Xiphilin! What a name to fling at the pit! How many of his public ever turn over the leaves of that abbreviator of Dion Cassius?<sup>2</sup> And the manager himself, does he *really* read Xiphilin? "A question not to be asked," for listen to his preface, written in the choicest English—

"The success which attended the production of *King John* last season at this theatre has encouraged me to attempt another Shakespearian revival on the same scale. The very uncertain information, however, which we possess respecting the dress worn by the inhabitants of Scotland in the eleventh century, renders any attempt to present

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<sup>1</sup> It is curious that Westland Marston did not think Mrs. Kean's Lady Macbeth a good performance. Of her sleep-walking scene he says, "It had not the abrupt flashes of recollection that reveal the hauntings of conscience."

<sup>2</sup> Johannes Xiphilinus was a monk who lived at the end of the eleventh century.



the tragedy of *Macbeth* attired in the costume of that period a task of very great difficulty. I hope, therefore, I may not be deemed presumptuous if I intrude a few words upon the subject, and endeavour to explain upon what authorities I have based my opinions."

Could he have heard the "guffaws" which saluted that bill, he would have fervently wished it unwritten. It was praiseworthy in him to take so much pains about his costume; but suppose Mr. Smith were to follow this example, and tell the public all the books on the Australian diggings he *might* have read before producing *Gold*,<sup>1</sup> or Mr. Webster were to tell us all the authorities upon which he based his *opinions* before he produced *Masks and Faces*!

This is a digression. Let me return to the *mise en scène*, which really does display research and ingenuity. All the old stage "business" has been altered, and mostly improved. Thus, the wounded soldier, instead of coming on as if he had run all the way from the battlefield, is brought in on a litter. The banquet scene, again, has a most life-like and picturesque aspect—it is a real glimpse into feudal times. The appearances of Banquo's ghost are admirable, and ghostly. The scenery throughout is both pictorial and historical. For a spectacle, one cannot desire anything more animated, varied, imposing. It shows—what I have always said—that Charles Kean has a real appreciation of artistic *mise en scène*, and that whatever one may think of him as an actor, he deserves public support as a manager. But there is a want perceptible through it all—the want of a poetical mind. Melodramatic effects he can reach—he falls short of poetry. Thus, the least effective portion of the present *mise en scène* is the witch portion. In the first

<sup>1</sup> Charles Reade's play of *Gold*, produced at Drury Lane, under the management of E. T. Smith. For *Masks and Faces* see p. 222.

place, for one who pretends to care for Shakespeare, it is a gross violation of the poet's meaning to multiply the three weird sisters—those Parcae of the north—into some fifty absurdly attired witches, called in managerial English “the vocal *strength* engaged for this occasion” (and strength of lungs they did display!). How much effect is lost by this need only be hinted. In the next place, these witches exhibit a fatiguing unanimity: they all simultaneously throw their arms up, and down again, as an expression of rejoicing, till one thinks they are puppets moved by mechanism—living marionettes. The same mistake is committed by the other crowds upon the stage—they throw themselves into the *same* attitude at given signals, thereby destroying the peculiarity of a mob of individuals.

These are but small deductions from the general effect, which is, assuredly, very remarkable; and for those who want to see *Macbeth* arranged as a spectacle—indifferent whether it be Shakespearian or not—I can promise them that a visit to the Princess's will be a treat. Indeed, I am anxious that all my readers should go, if only to test the accuracy of what is here written on the acting.

## LA DAME AUX CAMÉLIAS.

*April 2, 1853.*

You may have observed that at the great dramatic periods of Christmas and Easter, when every theatre puts forth its weakness, and loudly beats its drum to attract the public ear, I bravely desert my post, and fly the danger of confronting so many consecutive nights. The charms of country houses, at all times alluring, become doubly alluring then! This Easter I “*screwed* my courage to the *sticking-place*,” as the

Swan somewhat inappropriately says (if he *did* say it), and, declining a most agreeable visit, resolved to let Easter do its worst.

To appreciate this heroism, you must cast your eye over the announcements of Easter preparations, and ask yourself how *you* would relish the duty of spending the whole week with Charles Kean and the ceiling-walker,<sup>1</sup> with Slingsby Lawrence, in nine acts, and "sterling comedies" at the Haymarket; with bandit stories, and Webster's "Adelphi hits!" At Drury Lane we were threatened with a version of *La Dame aux Camélias*,<sup>2</sup> but the Lord Chamberlain refused a licence to this unhealthy idealisation of one of the worst evils of our social life. Paris may delight in such pictures, but London, thank God! has still enough instinctive repulsion against pruriency not to tolerate them. I declare I know of few things in the way of fiction more utterly wrong, unwholesome, and immoral, than this *Dame aux Camélias*, which has been *the* success of the last ten years! How men who have within them the capacity for high and deep feelings, who think of Love as something more than a "heat and fervour of the blood," can be delighted at this hideous parody of passion, and tolerate this idealisation of corruption, would be a mystery, if one did not know the strange contradictions even honest minds will allow to live side by side, and if one did not know the

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Sands, the American Ceiling-Walker, who appeared at Drury Lane, was described as performing his "antipodal feat . . . in defiance of the laws of *equitation*"!

<sup>2</sup> The first play of Alexandre Dumas, *filis*, founded on a novel of the same name, and produced at the Théâtre du Vaudeville, February 2, 1852. It had been rejected by half the theatres in Paris, and with difficulty passed the French censorship. Its success was immense, and it is now recognised as marking an epoch in the history of the French drama. For its adventures in England, see next page.

effects of education—education on *this* point profoundly and perniciously wrong. Even those who think the evil a sad necessity, must own that it *is* an evil, and a very sad necessity,—too sad to be treated lightly, too hideous to be poetised and made “interesting.” The *banale* excuse that “such things are,” is no justification; every hospital has its horrible realities, which it must keep from the public eye, and which Art refuses to acknowledge as materials. I am not prudish, nor easily alarmed by what are called “dangerous” subjects, but *this* subject I protest against with all my might;—a subject not only unfit to be brought before our sisters and our wives, but unfit to be brought before *ourselves*. The very skill with which young Dumas has treated it, makes his crime the greater, because it tends to confuse the moral sense, by exciting the sympathy of an audience. I do not place much faith in the “danger” of love-stories teaching how to sin, according to Ovid,—*peccare docentes*,—but I do believe that the false education men receive, in the direction of the sexual sentiment, is pandered to by stories such as this of the consumptive courtesan and her ignoble lover; and, if any Lord Chamberlain be supine enough to licence it,—but there is no fear! <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *La Dame aux Camélias* lay for many years under the ban of the Censorship, though the operatic version, *La Traviata*, was licensed. Ultimately Lewes's friend and colleague, Mr. E. F. S. Pigott (otherwise “Le Chat-Huant”), licensed a version of it by Mr. James Mortimer, under the title of *Heartsease*, in which Madame Modjeska appeared at the Court Theatre, May 1, 1880. The play is now freely performed, both Sarah Bernhardt and Eleonora Duse having appeared in it repeatedly.

## RACHEL.

June 4, 1853.

It is really "an event" in the season when the great tragic actress opens a series of performances at that most charming of theatres, the St. James's.<sup>1</sup> All those who have never seen her, feel within them the longings of an old desire; all who have trembled beneath her passionate eloquence long once more to feel the strange thrill which follows the flashing terror of those eyes, the wild unearthly grandeur of "that little rod of Moses."

And here she is again amongst us, in the power and the glory of her genius, in the consciousness of her unapproached excellence! Phèdre, languishing in the restlessness of unsatisfied unholy desire—

"C'est Vénus tout entière à sa proie attachée,"

and recurring in remorse to the time when

"Mes jours moins agités couloient dans l'innocence."

Phèdre, miserable, because from amid all the sophistications of passion emerges the clear steady conviction of her own criminality—

"Objet infortuné des vengeances célestes  
Je m'abhorre encor plus que tu ne me détestes;"

in a word, Phèdre, the great creation of a great poet, who has infinitely surpassed his Greek model, is represented by Rachel with an intensity and subtlety of passion and discrimination which makes one feel how great an artist

<sup>1</sup> Rachel appeared in *Phèdre* on June 1; *Polyeucte*, June 3; *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, June 4 (Régnier playing Michonnet); Augier's *Diane*, June 8 (in which Lewes declared that she "was herself again," with warm praise for the play as well); *Lady Tartuffe* (see next article), June 15.



she is, and how great a poet she is representing. If English audiences do not appreciate Racine—and they do not—so much the worse for them. As Fuseli once said in a dispute about the merits of Petrarch, “Dere is many reasons why de Petrarca shall not be understood in England; de first is, de d—d ignorance of de language!” and although the St. James’s audience may flatter itself it knows French, it is miserably mistaken, if it cannot taste the exquisite beauty of Racine’s verse. Let me, however, say in defence, that unless people knew the verse before they went to the theatre, they are to be excused for not feeling its beauty when they hear it mauled and mangled by those merciless mountebanks

“Who mouth a sentence as curs mouth a bone.”

Such a troupe! ye gods! There is a Theseus—the god-like Theseus—represented by “a party from Astley’s without his horse,” as little Jarker, sitting beside me, remarked. There is an Aricie of about four hundred; and Hippolyte, a little pudgy Jew boy, who ought to be selling melons.

But now imagine the other parts to be played by actors at all resembling Rachel, and then what a tragedy would the *Phèdre* appear! Not that Rachel does justice to the verse. In days of yore, when she had her reputation to make, and made it, Rachel used to deliver those verses, *que c’était une bénédiction!* It was a charm, a spell, to listen to her musical utterance and delicately shaded expression of the poetry; *now* she gabbles, mashes up the rhythm, hurries over the ground as if only eager to reach her “points,” becomes often unintelligible even to me who know the lines by heart, and—were it not for the splendour of her flashes, and the general truth of her conception—



would spoil the effect altogether. For, be pleased to observe, in these plays composed after the Grecian model, with little story and no incident, the verse becomes all important. Elaborately written, it should be uttered so that not a syllable be lost. Her acting now resembles that of the elder Kean; it is saved by its points; formerly her level speaking was equally admirable.

I will not disguise the fact, that Rachel has greatly fallen off from her own standard; but it is also true, that no one on the stage approaches even her present standard; and the crowded, delighted audiences seem to think so too.

## LADY TARTUFE.

June 18, 1853.

ON Wednesday the much-expected comedy, *Lady Tartufe*,<sup>1</sup> was produced, before a house crowded from ceiling to orchestra (the very orchestra was abolished), and received with applause, although not with enthusiasm. There are those who wonder why *Lady Tartufe* disappointed the Parisians. The reason surely is simple enough? *Lady Tartufe* is a weak and disagreeable play, abounding in wit, in cynicism, in sparkling points, but wanting the main elements of dramatic success: a good fable and life-like characters.

Lady Tartufe herself has some admirable touches, touches which reveal not only a keenly sarcastic and

<sup>1</sup> Five-act comedy by Madame de Girardin (1804-1855), produced at the Théâtre-Français, February 10, 1853. This lady, whose maiden name was Delphine Gay, was the wife of the famous journalist Emile de Girardin, who collaborated with Dumas *fil*s in *Le Supplice d'une Femme*. Madame de Girardin also wrote *La Joie fait Peur*. See p. 277.

femininely observant pencil, but which also indicate dramatic power; yet, on the whole, the character is a complete failure—the details are elaborately drawn, but they are not organised into a character. Destourbières is the other attempt at character, and he is more palpably untrue. A scamp and pimp in the first two acts, he suddenly throws off that larval condition, emerging into virtue and delicate sensibilities, because the authoress wishes it! The supposition of such a right-minded man, as he suddenly becomes, being forced into so disgraceful a position, as that from which he emerges, merely because he owes Lady Tartufe a sum of money, and that on borrowing the said sum, to repay her, there is “a total eclipse of the *mauvais sujet*,”—is a supposition quite childish; and yet, so dearly does an audience delight in virtue, so pleased is the healthy heart of the mass with even the semblance of reform, the applause which followed Destourbières’s conversion was uproarious! That one bit of virtue cleared the atmosphere!

Sudden conversions I disbelieve, *in toto*; but, even granting their sincerity, they must be prepared. Now Destourbières’s conversion is not only sudden, and without sufficient motive, it is in violent contradiction to the whole *tone* of his mind. He is a cynic, a sceptic, a pimp, a liar, a beggar, and we are asked to believe in his changing from all these the instant he can repay Lady Tartufe the sum she lent him!

Rachel, as Lady Tartufe, looked the beautiful fascinating serpent, and was more graceful, more “distinguished” in manner, than anything now to be seen on the stage, or perhaps off it. If she was somewhat monotonous, the fault lies in her part, since, in each succeeding act, she has to repeat all the emotions she depicted in the first. But the perfect representation of each *nuance* of emotion, the

exquisite perception of the significance of trifles, the thorough identification of herself with the character, are things to be seen, and, once seen, never to be forgotten. Her manner, when destroying the fair fame of her young victim, when awaiting the storm which will follow the exposure, when fascinating the old Maréchal, and bringing him to a declaration, and, finally, when she comes to the rendezvous, and, having taken off her bonnet and scarf, warms her feet at the fire, in an attitude of the most exquisite grace,—these are pictures painted on the memory, baffling description. Like a beautiful panther, in her graceful power and merciless malignity, you may shudder at her, but the shudder runs through admiration the most intense.

Régnier was, as he always is, the delight of the scene! His keen, intellectual marking of each detail, his absolute *naturalness*, the *brio* of his style, the *relief* he gives to phrases, charging them with a significance unsuspected during the reading, and the animal spirits with which he enlivens every part, make him the greatest favourite of the *comedians* who come to London; and in Destourbières, the success of the evening was more than shared by him.

But, oh! that M. Raphael! Words of mine have no potency of scorn sufficient to express the feelings which his vulgarity, conceit, and incompetence rouse in me; and not only in me, but in all with whom I have spoken. The whole Rachel troupe is indescribably bad, but there is a pretension about M. Raphael which throws his badness into hideous relief. If Mr. Mitchell has any regard for his theatre, he will not again allow Rachel to bring her own troupe—a troupe which, if she had the slightest feeling of an Artist, or cared one button for the art she illustrates, she would blush to present. It is quite true that people “go to

see Rachel," and not the troupe; but I can assure Mr. Mitchell that the troupe keeps many away who, having seen Rachel before, refuse—and justly—to endure the *entourage*—which she has the bad taste to carry with her into the provinces, and into the St. James's Theatre.

SARDANAPALUS.<sup>1</sup>

June 18, 1853.

"*Lisez ses programmes, c'est un puit de science; entrez en conversation, c'est un ignorant,*" said some one (*je soupçonne ce quelqu'un!*) of a "party" who was magnificent in prospectuses. And, indeed, if you read Charles Kean's play-bills, you are for ever after lost in wide astonishment at his talk. In his bill displays you see a man who reads Xiphilin at breakfast, takes up the *Eyrbyggia Saga* with a biscuit and a glass of sherry at luncheon, and sups with Diodorus Siculus! Lo! I show you a miracle!

Appalled at Charles Kean's erudition (which of course I believe in), I am not surprised to find he has "learnt that scenic illustration, *if it have the weight of authority*, may adorn and add dignity to the noble works of genius." Observe, *only* if it have the weight of authority! Scenic illustration is a mere pandering to the public eye unless it can cite its pedigree! The architecture must be vouched for by Diodorus Siculus, the vegetation by Strabo, the tinsel by Xiphilin, the rouge and beard by the *Eyrbyggia Saga*!

Let but a *pundit* own the happy lines,  
How the stage brightens! how the scene refines!

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<sup>1</sup> Produced at the Princess's, "considerably abridged for stage representation," June 13.

In other words : Managers who have hitherto spent money and invention in "getting up" spectacles to attract the crowd were mere showmen ; but I, Charles Kean, taking my stand upon Xiphilin, adorn and add dignity to noble works of genius.

To show how completely the pundit absorbs the actor, I need only quote this significant sentence : " It is a noteworthy fact that, until the present moment, it has been *impossible* to render Lord Byron's tragedy of *Sardanapalus* upon the stage *with proper dramatic effect*, because until now we have known nothing of Assyrian architecture and costume." There, you have it in his own words, " architecture and costume " alone render " dramatic effect possible ! " Human emotion is not dramatic. The fluctuating expression of the human countenance, the power and the music of the human voice are not capable of rendering tragedy with proper dramatic effect !—which is profoundly true of *his* face and *his* voice ; but what would his father have said to such an opinion ? I saw Macready play *Sardanapalus* to Ellen Tree's *Myrrha* twenty years ago,<sup>1</sup> and although the scenic illustration of that tragedy was innocent of Layard, and has altogether faded from my memory, the actors live with me—faces and tones are vividly impressed on my memory. Will any one twenty months hence remember Charles Kean's face and voice in *this* part ?

I have been forced into these remarks. So long as Charles Kean continues in bad taste to perpetuate bills such as those of *Macbeth* and *Sardanapalus*, so long will I criticise and ridicule them.

P.S.—The foregoing was written before I had seen

<sup>1</sup> At Drury Lane, April 10, 1834.



*Sardanapalus*. I have just left the theatre, but my criticism, written under the impression of *ennui* and disappointment suffered there, is so unfavourable that I tear it up, and will write another next week, when the calmer impartiality of a judge may replace the feelings of a wearied advocate.

## CHARLES KEAN AND SARDANAPALUS.

June 25, 1853.

To redeem my promise, I will try to express with moderation what really was the effect of *Sardanapalus* on the *Chat Huant*<sup>1</sup> and myself, as we sat out its lengthened splendour, its weary pomp.

“Got up” with splendour and with care the piece undoubtedly is. All that archæology could do has been done. Whether the result was worth the labour may be a question, even among those who think scenery and costume the “be-all and the end-all” of the drama. But I waive that question. I will suppose the spectacle to be as effective as to us it was wearisome; I will suppose the winged bulls (in flats) to have had a truly massive grandiose effect; I will suppose the conflagration at the end to be something more than a rival of the eruptions of Etna and Vesuvius at the Surrey Zoo Gardens—something more than red fire and collapsing “flies”—and still say *cui bono*? Is the Drama nothing more than a Magic Lantern on a large scale? Was Byron only a pretext for a panorama? It is a strange state of Art when the mere *accessories* become the aim and purpose of representation—when truth of archæology supplants truth of human passion—when “winged bulls”

<sup>1</sup> The late Edward F. S. Pigott, the Examiner of Plays. See Introduction, p. xxiv.



dwarf heroic natures ! Charles Kean is so bad an actor, and his troupe is so incompetent, that the policy of subordinating drama to spectacle is undeniable from *his* point of view ; but how about the public ? Why not give up the drama altogether, and make the Princess's Theatre a Gallery of Illustration ?

Far be it from me to deny the pains and liberality displayed in getting up this spectacle ! The ballet was really an ingenious adaptation of those quaint attitudes one sees in the old Assyrian paintings to movements of the dance—the Hall of Nimrod and the grouping of the revellers—indeed, all the stage effects of the third act were finer than almost anything yet put on the stage, of their kind. Laud these to the utmost and you do not meet the two fatal objections—first, that the sum-total of all this splendour, all this archæology, all this “business,” is overpowering weariness ; and second, that in a drama the accessories are but accessories, subordinate and not to be brought into the first rank. In proportion as the drama claims a hearing in right of its poetical conception and execution—that is to say, in proportion as it appeals to our higher faculties, and not to the lower appetites—the accessories become unimportant, and their prominence becomes impertinent.

When Macready produced *Sardanapalus* the play was worth seeing ; and of his acting I have vivid remembrance, although twenty years have glided on since then. The impression Charles Kean is likely to leave is one of astonishment that any man accustomed to the stage could speak the verse so ignorantly, and *evade* expression so successfully. To say that he did not represent the character of Sardanapalus is to say nothing new : what *character* did he ever represent in more than a single aspect ? But there is something remarkable in the ignor-

ance seemingly implied in his delivery of various passages, which jars on the mind of the audience. It may not be in his power to represent the fluctuations of feeling; he may not have the plastic power of mimetically setting forth the varying aspects of character, but he must know the plain meaning of plain English words, and therefore is it astounding to see him not only carefully evading any representation of the effeminate voluptuousness and careless indifference of Sardanapalus, but also uttering the words in tones directly contrary to the sense. Thus, when the sword is placed in his hands, he gives it back, with the remark that it is too heavy, and this remark, instead of expressing effeminacy, he utters as if it were a stolid assertion of a matter of fact! How Byron would have fumed could he have heard his intention thus rendered! Charles Kean omits the detail which Byron laid so much stress on, viz., Sardanapalus calling for the mirror to arrange his curls before rushing into battle; but as he also omits to give *any* indication of the 'effeminacy, he, perhaps, instinctively felt that detail would raise a titter! In writing to Murray, Byron says, "Sardanapalus is almost a comic character; but for that matter, so is Richard the Third." Charles Kean would have been comic had he not been so dull. He may, perhaps, reply that his notions of dramatic effect differ from those of others, which is true: *he* thinks no proper dramatic effect possible except with "authentic costume"; the world thinks it possible only with an intelligent mind and expressive face! Costume, however, was avowedly his object. He offered himself merely as a lay figure for a Layardian picture. That object he has attained.

## RACHEL'S DETERIORATION.

July 2, 1853.

RACHEL has concluded her most successful season. It may be a point for critics to discuss, why Rachel should this year have been more run after than on any previous occasion, for she herself has lamentably deteriorated, and her troupe is detestable beyond epithets. Not that the audiences perceive any difference! I will do them that justice. They accept actors who should never have quitted the circus, and they applaud the worst pieces, and the worst passages of those pieces, with admirable tact.

Let me briefly point out wherein Rachel's acting has deteriorated. I have spoken before of her careless gabbling—of her rushing onwards to make “points,” totally indifferent as to the rest. But an attentive observation will have noted that besides this most unartistic practice, she has acquired a certain mechanicalness even in the production of the “points” themselves. What I mean is that—to use a technical phrase—her emotion becomes “business.” She *does* it, she does not feel it. Her command over the mimetic means is so great, that she can in an instant quiver as with emotion, her voice growing husky with passion. This command it is which makes her capable of tragedy. But she has learned to do it mechanically, and the consequence is her “points” are “explosions,” followed by perfect calmness. One moment she is quivering with agony, the next she is in a state of lady-like self-possession. The *secondary emotions of subsiding passion* she no longer represents; and *that* is what I indicate in saying she has become mechanical.

But this objection, strong as it is, must not be made

without the accompanying acknowledgment of her matchless grace, and the delicate beauty of much of her style. I compare her with what she was, and find her fallen off. Compare her with any one else on the stage, and this little "rod of Moses" is an enchantress!

### EMIL DEVRIENT.

July 16, 1853.

YEARS ago, when I was a happy and rebellious boy, my artistic impulses were gratified by *tinselling* the theatrical prints sold by Mr. Marks.<sup>1</sup> The reader knows what I mean. He also has a vivid recollection of those specimens of art, "1d. plain, 2d. coloured," in which Mr. Biggs as Orlando, or Mr. Frazer as Prince Karl,—with a pistol in one hand and a sword in the other—with legs very wide apart, and arms telegraphically displayed—with faultless features, except that they had no expression—and with superb costumes, not strictly historical—offered to the youthful mind images of grace and grandeur which no Raphael could approach.

If the reader remembers those pictures and his sensations on beholding them, if, like me, in moments of weariness and unrest, he is apt to manifest his misanthropy (and knowledge of German) by spouting the lines from *Faust*,—

"Ich hatte nichts und doch genug!  
Den Drang nach Wahrheit und die Lust am Trug.  
Gieb ungebändigt jene Triebe,  
Gieb meine Jugend mir zurück!"

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Louis Stevenson's *Memories and Portraits*, "A Penny Plain and Twopence Coloured;" also "The Drama in Pasteboard," by W. Archer, *Art Journal*, 1887.

if he wants "to be a boy again," I advise him to go and see Emil Devrient in *Donna Diana*.<sup>1</sup> No sooner did my eye rest on that vacant face, with its well-cut features and expressionless eyes, no sooner did I perceive the wide-spreading legs and arms thrown into a series of attitudes never witnessed anywhere but on the stage—no sooner did I see him take a seat with that peculiar outstretched length of limb supposed to be graceful, and much cultivated by tenors and tragedians, than involuntarily I exclaimed, "1d. plain, 2d. coloured, by Jove!" In truth, Emil Devrient is a living specimen of *Marks' Theatrical Characters*—you might tinsel him! I am told that in *Donna Diana* he is considered as "the ideal of a Spanish cavalier;" but as I am not told *whose* ideal, I must conclude it is the ideal of Mr. Marks. Look at him: watch the striding stiffness of his deportment, the tenor-like grace of his meaningless gestures, the vacancy of his handsome face, and tell me whether he is more like Marks' heroes or human nature. It is true that among critics I am in a minority,<sup>2</sup> but let me ask:—*Is* Devrient's face expressive? *Does* he express emotion? *Is* the deportment natural or

<sup>1</sup> The season of German Plays opened Monday, July 4, with Devrient as Egmont. This was followed by *Faust* (July 6); *Preciosa*, with Weber's music (July 8); *Die Widerspenstige* (*The Taming of the Shrew*), with Devrient as Petruchio, and Frau Stolte as Katherine (July 9); *Donna Diana* (July 11); *Wilhelm Tell* (July 13); *Hamlet* (July 20); *Othello* (July 22); *Fiesco* (July 25); *Don Carlos* (July 27); *Die Braut von Messina* (July 29). Most of these plays were performed only once, but *Donna Diana*, *Faust*, and *Die Widerspenstige* were given twice, and *Wilhelm Tell* three times. It brought the season to a close on July 30.

<sup>2</sup> Macready, writing to Sir Frederick Pollock, says that from the criticisms he had read (of Devrient's *Hamlet*) he gathered that he possessed a "very second-rate mind."



significant? I admire as much as you can admire his beautiful diction, and his noble voice; but for acting we want intellect, passion, representative power, and Emil Devrient has little. People may applaud him, as the Germans have applauded and enriched the African actor, Ira Aldridge;<sup>1</sup> but if there are any principles in criticism, if it is not all caprice, I confidently assert Emil Devrient to be an actor of hopeless mediocrity.

It is almost idle to raise a voice against him. People accepted the Mephistopheles of a "super" who was allowed to play the part because no one else knew it; to the critics and the St. James's audience that performance appeared excellent! They also accepted, and with praise, Frau Stölte's arrogant princess in *Donna Diana*, though anything more intensely *bourgeoise* can scarcely be imagined. Now when the delusive effect of strangeness is so great as that—when an audience can call a Frau Stölte back to receive the ovation of a Rachel, it is idle to wonder at their admiring Emil Devrient!

This *Donna Diana* is a wearisome rhymed comedy, imitated from one of the very early Spanish comedies, Moreto's *El desden con el desden*,<sup>2</sup> the idea of which has been so often worked on every European stage, that only excellent details could make it endurable; and I'll trouble you for details in a German comedy! But a patient audience meekly sat it out, and applauded when possible. I was meek for three acts, and then tore myself away from its siren dulness.

On Wednesday, however, we had really a treat with

<sup>1</sup> See p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> An adaptation by Westland Marston of the German adaptation of Moreto's play was produced at the Princess's Theatre, December 1863, with Mr. and Mrs. Hermann Vezin in the leading parts.



Schiller's finest piece, *Wilhelm Tell*<sup>1</sup>—his finest because his last, and his was a mind which, as Goethe said, strode forward with giant steps. Goethe's influence is also very visible in this play. Not only in the conception of Tell's character, which Goethe gave, but also in its broader views of life and freer realism. Goethe has influenced this work in the same way as the German school influenced the *Guillaume Tell* of Rossini, also his latest and best opera. But as the dominant tendency of Rossini's genius—melody—is visible in this opera no less than in the earlier operas; so also the dominant tendency of Schiller's genius—rhetoric—is still visible in this work. Where Goethe would, like Shakespeare, have expressed a thought or an emotion in one teeming verse, Schiller rhetorically expands it into a dozen. This begets tediousness; it deprives the audience of active co-operation.

A noble play, however, and thoroughly historical, is that of *Wilhelm Tell*, historical in the deepest sense. It was performed with greater effect than any previous work of this season. Emil Devrient, whom I have just laughed at, I must now say was admirable. He played the plain, rough, manly Tell in a rough and manly style; the manner was "stagey," and the stride detestable; but it was an effective performance, wherein the handsome person and deep sonorous voice were very telling. The emotion was *surface* emotion, expressed by conventional signs—signs *never* seen in real emotion; and to explain his whole performance by a comparison, I would say that it was just the sort of Tell Wallack would have represented. Good, but stagey; without a gleam of genius. Dessoir was fiendish and calm as Gessler; a word of praise also to Herr Pauli, who spoke the lines of Attinghausen to perfection. The audience

<sup>1</sup> See Note, p. 255.

seemed delighted with that bad actor who played Melchtal in a fat, boisterous style, and had not a hand for Pauli!

## FIRST IMPRESSION OF ROBSON.

July 23, 1853.

ON Monday night<sup>1</sup> I was induced to stay and see Mr. F. Robson,<sup>2</sup> the burlesque actor of whom I had heard so much, that, in spite of my rooted dislike to the whole class of parodies of this kind, curiosity was roused. The piece—*Shylock*—is simply ignoble. I object to all these desecrations of fine works, but *Shylock* has not even a laugh to silence criticism. It is not a parody of Shakespeare—it is not the obverse side of the picture—it is not tragedy pushed over its limits and falling into the absurd—it is an

<sup>1</sup> Olympic Theatre, July 18. The Olympic was now under the management of the elder Farren, and Lewes had gone to see a new comedy entitled *The Times*, which was put on before the burlesque. His "rooted dislike to the whole class of parodies" was shared by George Eliot. See the essay on "Debasing the Moral Currency" in *Theophrastus Such*.

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Robson (Thomas Robson Brownbill) was born at Margate in 1821. Apprenticed to a copper-plate engraver at the age of fifteen, at the age of twenty he became an actor, and spent some years in the provinces. From 1844 to 1850 he was leading comedian at the Grecian Saloon Theatre, City Road. He then spent some time in Ireland; and on March 28, 1853, he made his first appearance at the Olympic, where he rapidly rose into fame. On April 25 he appeared in Frank Talfourd's burlesque of *Macbeth*, and on July 4 as Shylock in the same writer's *Merchant of Venice Preserved*. Among his subsequent successes were Desmarets in *Plot and Passion* (see p. 268), Planché's *Yellow Dwarf*, *Medea*, "in which Ristori was not caricatured so much as emulated," Daddy Hardacre, a more or less remote descendant of Balzac's Grandet, and Sampson Burr in *The Porter's Knot*. He died in 1864.

incoherent, foolish, wearisome burlesque suggested by the *Merchant of Venice*. Not a gleam, not a laugh! The only endurable portion of it was Mr. Robson's performance—which is certainly peculiar, showing mimetic power and significance of gesture, but no humour. It was not funny—yet it was not tragic, although hovering on the confines of tragedy. It had the merit of originality and invention; but I must see Mr. Robson in some character not burlesque before venturing on an opinion as to his powers.

## GERMAN PLAYS: OTHELLO.

July 30, 1853.

TO-NIGHT the short season of German Plays is brought to a close. It was short, but, as Dr. Johnson said to the unhappy preacher (who congratulated himself on the Doctor's not having found his sermon long), "I feared lest I might be tedious,"—"Sir, you were *not* long, but you *were* tedious."

For a few nights I suffered myself to be dragged to the St. James's, by a compound of gallantry and duty—gallantry to fair friends, insanely desirous of seeing that mild mediocrity Emil Devrient, and duty to kind and curious readers, wanting to know "what was going on at the theatres." But not even Julia's violet eyes, nor Jane's persuasive snub, not even the fear of insatiable correspondents, nor demands for "copy" could induce me to sit out the final performances of *Fiesco*, *Don Carlos*, and the *Braut von Messina*; so that all I can, this week, write about, is *Othello*,<sup>1</sup> which was played last Friday, in a quiet dreary style.

<sup>1</sup> See Note, p. 255.

Herr Dessoir,<sup>1</sup> the leading tragedian, from Berlin, by his performance of Othello, proved what I suspected, from his performance of Faust, that he had a fine intelligence to conceive, and, in some respects, a mastery over the *representative* power, requisite in the portrayal of character under emotion, but he lacks the physical capabilities demanded by the part. He excels where Devrient is so deficient,—namely, in intelligence and emotion; but he is deficient in those indispensable qualities which constitute the whole of Devrient's claims,—namely, personal appearance, bearing, voice, and diction. I never before heard the speech to the senate delivered with such thorough poetic appreciation and artistic execution, never saw any actor, not even Kean, so truthful and so tragic in the representation of *emotion*, during the *early* portions of the great tempting scene. The restrained feeling, struggling for utterance; the chilled and almost paralysed soul, trying to disbelieve, trying, also, to be calm; the convulsive shudders, which not only betrayed the suffering then racking him, but also indicated the apoplectic<sup>2</sup> fit which was to come; the hoarse voice, and the intense quietness, conveyed a more truthful and tragic representation than any Othello conveyed to my mind before. Critics who are the dupes of

<sup>1</sup> Ludwig Dessoir (1809-1874), after a wandering novitiate, became one of the leading actors of the Berlin Court Theatre in 1849, and held that position until his retirement in 1872. He played most of the great Shakespearian parts — Richard III., Hamlet, Othello, Lear, Shylock, Brutus, Mark Antony, Coriolanus, King John, Clarence, Macduff, Hotspur, Iachimo, Dromio of Ephesus, and the Fool in *Twelfth Night* and *Lear*. His biographer in the *Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* cites this article, and states that Lewes preferred Dessoir to Kean; but it will be seen that Lewes's preference referred only to one passage in the part.

<sup>2</sup> *Sic.* Query: "epileptic"?

Devrient may have seen little in it; but those who trusted to their own emotions, felt what Devrient never made them feel—that here was a passionate soul, depicted in its agony.

But, on the other hand, it must be noted first, that when the scene demands from Othello an exaltation of emotion—when the inward suffering flames into passion, expressing itself with terrible vehemence and power, there where Kean was so terrific and lion-like, Herr Dessoir was not equal to the part. He was spasmodic and monotonous; and instead of rising to a climax, the successive phases left me disappointed and unmoved. The final scene was monotonous. Othello, when he murders Desdemona, should be calm, but terribly calm, with white wrath more perfect than any vehemence.

Secondly, it must be noted that Othello, above all other tragic personages, needs great physical qualities in the performer. He must redeem his black complexion by dignity and power which outwardly express the greatness of his spirit. There must be something about him which makes us *feel* Desdemona could have loved him. Kean, in spite of his small stature, had that something. There was a lion-like grace about him; and his eye! who can forget that eye! Herr Dessoir is small, ungraceful, monotonous in his gestures, monotonous in voice, and his Othello was consequently neither grand nor powerful. I regard his performance, therefore, as unsatisfactory—but as the performance of a highly intelligent actor struggling against natural deficiencies.

If Herr Dessoir wanted power, Herr Pauli wanted everything in Iago—conception, power, finesse, truth. I never saw it so badly, so tamely played. As to Cassio and Roderigo, they were fully equal to the highest style of



barn acting. Fräulein Fuhr played Desdemona with less discrimination and charm than I expected; her scene with Emilia, however, was excellent. What a scene it is! I mean the one after Othello's jealousy, where she talks, as she undresses, of Ludovico, of reputed false wives, etc., one of the most Shakespearian scenes in the whole drama, and always omitted on our stage.<sup>1</sup>

### G. V. BROOKE AS VIRGINIUS.

*October 1, 1853.*

ON Saturday night I went to see Gustavus Brooke<sup>2</sup> play *Virginius*,<sup>3</sup> which was not a very lively entertainment, though a more successful performance—if boisterous applause can constitute success—has not made the walls of old Drury resound for many a long year. There was something half comical, half painful, in the stupid genuine delight of that eminently British public at the Boanerges of the Drama, as he “split the ears of the groundlings.” There is a story of

<sup>1</sup> The last scene of the fourth act, in which Desdemona sings the “Song of ‘Willow.’”

<sup>2</sup> Gustavus Vaughan Brooke (1818-1866) was a very robust tragedian of the second or third rank. He lost his life in the wreck of the *London* (January 11, 1866). “He distinguished himself,” says Professor Morley, “in the last hours of danger and despair, by higher qualities than actors have been often called upon to show. None laboured more strenuously to avert the deadly issue, which none bore, when it became inevitable, with more tranquil fortitude than he. Though he could not act Shakespeare, he must have been a noble fellow.”

<sup>3</sup> Drury Lane, September 24.



Power<sup>1</sup> entering the green-room of the Haymarket Theatre, dressed for Teddy the Tiler, who, as he stood against the mantelpiece, cool and pleasant, remarked to that spluttering tragedian, Charles Kean, who sat panting and perspiring, with all the dust and failure of Bosworth field upon him, "You seem hot, Mr. Kean." "Yes," replied Charles, with withering sarcasm, "there is some *difference* between playing Richard the Third and Teddy the Tiler." "Yes," replied Power, adjusting his neckcloth, "physically."

To make this story more perfect, the reader should be told, that not only is the story itself literally true, but that Charles Kean tells it *against* Power,—which is a pleasing illustration of his general quickness of perception.

"Physically," then, Gustavus Brooke is the greatest tragic actor on the stage, and as, except Phelps, all the other tragic actors known to me are not what I should call eminently intellectual, what I have just said amounts very much to saying that Brooke is, with that single exception, the greatest tragic actor on our stage. Nevertheless, he is "a man who, take him for all in all," I have no wish "to look upon his like again." The paradox of his success is intelligible as soon as one watches his audience. When he is violent,—and he is magnificently violent, with a certain leonine, sometimes bovine, power,—the audiences are in ecstasies. When he runs up his voice in alt, and drops to a double G, with the stretch of compass, if not with the *aplomb*, of an Alboni, the audiences are naïvely startled by the vocal feat, and, not troubled with critical misgivings as to sense, thoroughly give themselves up to the sensation. And thus a physical actor is applauded by a physical audience. The question of intelligence never comes into consideration. So undeniably

<sup>1</sup> Tyrone Power (1798-1841), a very popular comedian, especially in Irish characters.

was this the case on Saturday night, that the audience, uproarious when Brooke was roarious—uproarious when Davenport was spasmodic and noisy—manifested so high a relish for the sensation of sonority, that they loudly cheered even the mob, when the mob was tumultuous in its shilling-a-night republicanism. Why not! if Brooke and Davenport, stunning their lethargic ears, could earn their applause, why not ungainly “supers,” with a body of sound surpassing that of any single pair of lungs? One or two passages which Brooke delivered finely, with a quiet, manly pathos, passed unheeded; a British audience criticises acting as the dust-man did the unadulterated beer: “There’s no headache in it!”

From this you may gather that I am neither surprised nor swayed by Brooke’s success. I see in him the magnificent half of an actor, perhaps even (considering acting as *representation*, and that in representation the means are even more important than the intellect) one may say two-thirds of an actor; a noble person, a powerful voice, immense physical energy and a certain breadth of style, “if style it can be called which style is none,” an elocution careful (somewhat too careful), and a thorough familiarity with stage business and stage tradition: these are his qualities. Now, if you think of these qualities, and bear in mind that an audience always “takes for granted,” believing when a man says “I love you,” that he feels and looks what he says, you will understand how, with such an audience, the success of such an actor must be assured. At any rate, there is no disguising the fact that the audiences gathered within the walls of Drury Lane do greatly admire and enjoy Gustavus Brooke, and that every cultivated person you meet is lost in wide astonishment at such success being possible.

THE OLYMPIC AND ITS NEW MANAGEMENT  
(WITH A WORD ABOUT ROBSON).*October 22, 1853.*

ON Monday [October 17] the Olympic opened its doors, with by far the greatest prospect of success since the days when Madame Vestris made it the most novel, the most elegant, and the most attractive theatre in London. Alfred Wigan, a great favourite, socially and theatrically, has made a good start. His friends are satisfied. The game is in his own hands,—a perilous game, as all managers know; a game in which luck is greater than skill, and yet skill itself as indispensable as luck. To please a public with successive novelties is a terrible task; for the public, facile in enthusiasm, ready to gape at any absurdity others are gaping at, ready to rush out and see any “reed shaken by the wind,” is also a most capricious as well as stupid public, and more ungrateful than either.

Wigan is, I hope, too wise to be cajoled into security by his opening success.<sup>1</sup> We all know how promising are the honeymoons of management! Great as Wigan’s “reception” was (expressive of real hearty goodwill and admiration), great as was the enthusiasm of Monday night, such things have no permanent influence. Jones, who has shouted himself hoarse, and blistered his beefy hands in enthusiasm, will mercilessly hiss the first inferior piece, and as mercilessly keep away from the first dull one! Jones

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of fact, Alfred Wigan made the Olympic a great success. When he retired from its management in 1857 he was reported to have realised £10,000 by the venture.

himself, like his enthusiasm, is a vanishing phenomenon, not a perdurable noumenon !

This by way of moralising. On Monday, then, to resume narrative, the season was "inaugurated." *The Olympic Camp*, a sort of *revue* by Planché, and written in his very happiest vein, introduced the forces (and the "weaknesses") of the company, and while incidentally satirising the present state of the drama, announced the "intentions" of the new management. The piece is on an old and not agreeable plan, and is rather too long; but there are so many admirable and "telling" lines in it, the fun is so appreciable, and so removed from coarseness, that it passes off gaily. One point I wish to remark, because it is characteristic. The opening scene is meant to represent the bare walls and stage of a theatre; but on the stage it is almost impossible to get reality, and this scene, instead of being the reality (which was surely facile enough?), was the "stage idea" of a bare stage !

*Plot and Passion*, the drama in three acts which followed, is the joint production of Tom Taylor and John Lang (known as "Mofussilite" Lang<sup>1</sup>), and is an effective piece, carrying the audience with it from the first. The germ of the drama is Fouché's known practice of employing persons of rank as spies. Among his unhappy victims the beautiful Marie de Fontanges, thrown into his power by her unfortunate passion for gambling. He gives her money to indulge her vice, and she in turn gives him information. Become his instrument, through dread of exposure to the world which believes her spotless, she is forced to act as a decoy to bring to Paris one of Fouché's enemies. In doing so, she falls in love with the man whose ruin she is sent to

<sup>1</sup> He had published (1853) a novel entitled *Too Clever by Half*, "By the Mofussilite."

effect. I will not tell you more of the plot, lest the edge of curiosity be taken from your interest; but you can at once see the capabilities of such a story for powerful situation.

If it were a work of more pretensions, I would pause to point out several serious defects both of characterisation and construction; but there are only two points needful to be alluded to, and I allude to them because even in a drama of this unpretending class, they are sources of weakness. The first is a want of earnestness and passion in the dialogue; the second is the undramatic disposition to take for granted what ought to be shown: I allude to such points as Marie de Fontanges, both as gambler and spy, not being *represented*, but merely spoken of. We ought to see her under the fascination of play, and under the infamy of her office. Very fine dramatic material is lost by this neglect. If I am told that by such a picture her character would lose its "interest" with the audience, I reply, that in the first place, an audience sympathises strongly with human passion and human infirmity, and would be more inclined to pardon Marie if they felt her temptation, and saw her struggles; and, in the second place, do what you will, you cannot efface the stain from her forehead—she has been a spy and a gambler. Another point of the same "take for granted style," is Fouché's consummate ability and astuteness, of which we are perpetually told, but of which, throughout the piece, he exhibits *no* evidence.<sup>1</sup>

All deductions made, however, the piece is an ingeniously-wrought drama of the modern French school, abounding in

<sup>1</sup> "The subject of Fouché and his employment of women of fashion and ruined character as what was called his 'cohorte Cythérienne' . . . was suggested to me by Mr. John Lang. His name was on that ground originally associated with the authorship of the play."—Tom Taylor, *Historical Dramas*, p. 414. But when Lang, in 1859,



good situations, with characters strongly marked, and with the interest kept up to the last. Wigan played the Creole lover with very remarkable force of passion—the passion of a gentleman, not of a stage lover; and there were accents in his voice which made the audience thrill. Mrs. Stirling<sup>1</sup>—what a favourite she is!—threw all her pathos into the part of Marie; and Emery was careful in the part of Fouché. But *the* part in the piece was one I have not yet mentioned—a secretary of the Marall species, raised into dominant eminence by the admirable acting of Robson, who made a “hit” in it which will draw the town.

I had only seen this now popular actor in the burlesque *Shylock*; and it may be as well to repeat here what were my first impressions, given in *Leader* No. 174:—

“His performance is certainly peculiar, showing mimetic power and significance of gesture, but no humour. It was not funny—yet it was not tragic, although hovering on the confines of tragedy. It had the merit of originality and invention; but I must see Mr. Robson in some character not burlesque before venturing on an opinion as to his powers.”

Those were my first impressions; and those remain with me, after seeing him play the serpent secretary. He is a remarkable—a very remarkable actor; and I shall be much surprised if he do not become, in his way, a great actor;

published *The Secret Police, or Plot and Passion*, a novel, he stated that the story was not taken from the play, but the play dramatised from the story. See the correspondence between Tom Taylor and “Q” (Thomas Purnell) in the latter’s *Dramatists of the Present Day*, 1871.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Stirling (Fanny Clifton), wife of Edward Stirling, actor and stage-manager, and, after his death, of Sir William Gregory, was born in 1816, and died while these sheets were passing through the press, December 28, 1895. She made her first appearance in the West End at the Adelphi, January 1, 1836.



for he has two essential qualities—originality and mimetic power. Humour he has none; he is as dry and hard as “Crabstick Persius”; and it is not as a low comedian that he will take rank, but as an actor of Bouffé parts, in which character—individuality—is represented by truthful details. For I think those critics who credit him with tragic power make a fundamental mistake; because his Shylock was more serious than comic, they jumped to the conclusion that he would have played Shakespeare’s Shylock finely; because in this secretary the emotive passages were finely represented, his admirers pass on in admiration to the belief that he has tragic passion at command. Now, I must not be understood as depreciating Robson’s powers, but as *describing* and *defining* them, in saying, that he seems to me unequal to the force, breadth, and impassioned dignity of a tragic scene. It is not *passion* so much as *excitability* he pourtrays. The details by which he illustrates his emotion are all good, true, and suggestive; but they are *small*—they are details of an irritable nature easily moved, and moved from the surface—not of a passionate nature moved from the depths, “which moveth all together, if it move at all.” And hence my impression of his acting in burlesque, that it “hovered on the confines of tragedy,” remains true of his serious acting; it lies as near tragedy as temper does to passion—as the exasperation of an ordinary man against his wife does to the deep and all-absorbing passion of wronged Othello.

As an actor of what may be called Bouffé parts, I believe Robson will eventually take his position. In spite of his success—in spite of the powers which legitimate that success—he must not, however, be spoken of in the same breath with Bouffé—*yet*. Bouffé had both passion and humour. But he had, also, one quality which Robson

must work very hard still to attain—I mean, that of being *an artist*. In his performance on Monday, the details, taken separately, were admirable; but they made no homogeneous creation. There were dashes of burlesque, and rapid transitions, which marred the unity, because they were transitions not from one emotion to another, but from one individuality to another. He represented emotions of rage, jealousy, love, triumph, hate; but he never represented those emotions in their *subsidence*; on the contrary, the passage from one to the other was like that of figures in a galanteeshow. I direct his attention to this defect; because, with his intelligence, and mobile face, he *can* remedy it; whereas, to tell an actor like Charles Kean to express subsiding emotions, is like telling Daniel Lambert to jump over a hurdle!

## THE TWO RICHARDS: KEAN AND BROOKE.

February 25, 1854.

IF passion is the essence of tragedy, I ought to have gained experience enough from this week to last me a lifetime. In saying this I make one little supposition—viz., that tragic passion and a tragedian in a passion are one and the same thing. *C'est une très forte supposition; mais enfin!*

For, indeed, this week I have sat out the robustious play of *Richard III.*, and listened to the robustious acting of Charles Kean and G. V. Brooke, who (having apparently made the little supposition just named) presented pictures of men in a passion unrivalled on the stage. They both flew into a passion, and that of the most furious and stentorian kind, “upon the slightest provocation,” indeed without provocation at all. They roared and stamped, and

stamped and roared, spluttering and perspiring with an energy "worthy of a better cause." *Why* they were so furious in their flinging out of certain words and lines, or so melancholy in their drawling of others, I have not the remotest idea. Why Charles Kean should roll his *r's* with so terrrrrible an emphasis, and Brooke drop down to his *voix de ventre*, or preternatural growl, with words having in themselves no growling significance—these things belong to the subtleties of dramatic art, which I have not yet mastered, and therefore will not appreciate. But as both are actors of Shakespeare (not to be confounded with Shakespearian actors), they may remember what Hamlet says: "O, it offends me to the soul to hear a robustious perriwig-pated fellow tear a passion to tatters, to very rags, to split the ears of the groundlings. I would have such fellows whipped for o'erdoing Termagant; it out-herods Herod. O, there be players that I have seen play—and heard others praise, and that highly—who have so strutted, and bellowed, that I have thought some of nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably." As to the humanity imitated by the two Richards, I seriously declare that the original never met my eyes—except at Bartholomew Fair.

But let me be methodical, and touch upon details. On Monday Charles Kean produced *Richard III.*<sup>1</sup> for the first time during his management of the Princess's, and he produced it with that care, study, and effective disposition of material which characterises his management. The

<sup>1</sup> Kean's revival took place on February 20; Brooke, who had been playing a long series of "legitimate" characters at Drury Lane, followed on February 22. It should be noticed that in neither case was any attempt made to run the play continuously. It was performed at the Princess's on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday of the

scenery was admirable; the grouping spirited and picturesque; the dresses archæologically elaborate and theatrically splendid. Not a word but of commendation shall be uttered respecting the whole *mise en scène*. He *does* understand his business as a manager, and success rewards him. But as an actor?

His performance of Richard III., some seventeen years ago,<sup>1</sup> stands out as one of the most hilarious of my dramatic remembrances. He seemed to me then the very worst actor, out of a barn, playing great parts; and so it seemed to cultivated people, though the gods and groundlings delighted in him. He held the same sort of position, with less claim to it, that Brooke now holds; the many applauding things which made "the judicious grieve." Since then I had not seen his Richard. Played it he has, but it was my privilege not to see him, a privilege I cling to as a right:

"Else wherefore breathe I in a Christian land?"

Seventeen years is a long period, and on Monday night I was astonished at the improvement seventeen years of hard practice had effected with such hopeless materials. He played quietly, at first, and for him transcendently. I really thought it was going to be his best Shakespearian part. He had renounced the stampings, pauses, and spluttering bursts of the juvenile Richard; and if he manifested his abiding fault—that minute and detailed

first week, and at Drury Lane on Wednesday and Saturday. "In reviving *Richard III.* as altered by Cibber," said the *Times*, "Mr. Charles Kean has adopted a straightforward and manly course." Macready had made what Oxenford seems to have thought a dastardly attempt to return to the Shakespearian text.

<sup>1</sup> No doubt during his first "starring" engagement at Drury Lane in 1838, under Alfred Bunn's management. See Note, p. 41, and Introduction, p. xiv.

misconception of the *meaning* of the phrases he has to utter—it was to be set down to the general want of intelligence exhibited in his acting, and not to any particular fault of his Richard. His performance was broad, quiet, and effective. It had not the wondrous play of light and shade, of tone, manner, and gesture, with which his father indelibly impressed all who saw him. It had great, and quite ludicrous faults, if tested by any delicate criticism; but the sum-total was, as I said, broad and effective; especially to those who did not ask why bursts of triumphant gratulation, such as “Was ever woman in such humour wooed, Was ever woman in such humour won,” were roared out as if Richard were in a passion with all woman-kind!

With the violence of the fourth act all praise to his performance ceases until we reach the fight at the close of the fifth, a really good fight, desperate and effective. But for the rest, such vehemence misplaced, such emphasis at random, such loudness without passion, and melancholy quiet without cause, belongs to the style Hamlet reprobates. Might I be permitted to ask why Richard is to strike those wild attitudes, and shout

“*Rrrrrrr*richard’s himself again!”

when he really seems not himself, but quite beside himself? On the other hand, why does he ask the simple business question,

“Is my beaver easier than it was,  
And all my armour laid into my tent!”

in tones of drawling melancholy? I might go on for an hour asking questions of this kind, for Charles Kean’s acting is full of these absurdities. But if you see him (don’t), you will ask those questions for yourself.



From the foregoing, you gather that I do not highly estimate Charles Kean's Richard; but if—instead of comparing it with sense and nature—I compare it with the performance of G. V. Brooke on Wednesday, I must pronounce it great. It was effective; in some parts very effective. Brooke was less loud, because his voice is in ruins; but he was quite as vehement, and quite as random with the meanings. There were details in which he was superior to Kean, but he was not equal to him in any one scene. He has a fine presence and graceful gesture; Kean is ungainly and undignified. Both ranted—but Kean's superior vigour allowed him to rant superbly, whereas Brooke's voice was gone, and he could not thunder as he used; so that, considering the two performances *physically*<sup>1</sup> (you remember Power's reply to Charles Kean?), the one was triumphant, the other a failure.

I dare say my criticism will sound harsh to ears accustomed to the honeyed smoothness with which criticism nowadays expresses itself; but what is said is said deliberately, "weighing the words before I give them breath," and, as usual, I am prepared for its verification or rejection by every reader who has seen, or may see, the performances.

## THE THEATRES.

May 27, 1854.

It is now five weeks, *ami lecteur*, since I conveyed to you my fleeting impressions of the fleeting triumphs of the day. I sometimes complain of the bad atmosphere of theatres, but, believe me, it is better to breathe that atmosphere, contemplating mediocre acting, and "powerful," un-

<sup>1</sup> See p. 263.

interesting pieces, than to breathe, as I have been breathing, the sea breezes of the southern coast, or the gay, intoxicating air of Paris. Yes, it is a miserable fact! I would rather sit in the upper boxes of a crowded theatre, listening to the melodious voice of Charles Kean, and watching the varied expression of his passionate countenance, than drive through the avenues of the Bois de Boulogne, or

“Hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.”

You think this a paradox? one little detail will render it an appreciable truth. For me to be seated contemplating the splendours of Kean, implies that I have the health which permits that intellectual orgie. It is precisely *that* which has been wanting to me these last five weeks, and which has made Paris dull, and life a ton.

So that when I find myself once again within the walls of a theatre, though not quite well enough to justify my presence there, it seems as if a new lease of life had been signed. I did not, however, see the *Knights of the Round Table*, which has had a legitimate success at the Haymarket, thanks to Mr. Planché and the actors. It is an adaptation of *Les Chevaliers du Lansquenet*,<sup>1</sup> which had but moderate success when produced some time ago, and the skill of the adapter has apparently made all the difference between a good subject and a good piece. Although the taste of the Paris public is no standard for that of the English; witness, among many striking examples, the *Corsican Brothers*, which went for nothing in Paris—or, as a still more recent example, *Les Filles des Marbre*, which created a *furor* last year, and was even being played last week, but when played at the

<sup>1</sup> By Grangé and De Montépin, produced at the Ambigu, May 1850. Planché's adaptation was produced May 20, 1854.

Adelphi, on Monday, under the title of *The Marble Heart*,<sup>1</sup> produced no very great impression. The *Times* critic thinks that the adapter, Mr. Selby, has weakened the situation by bringing it into a more moral atmosphere. Perhaps so. But although Mr. Selby was forced into this change by the absence of any representative in English life of the Parisian *lorette*, I am convinced that he would have achieved no success at all comparable to that achieved in Paris, even had the state of society in England afforded him the requisite type; for even in Paris it was the success of the *Dame aux Camélias* which made that of the *Filles de Marbre* possible. There, as one observes with amazement, the courtesan is a public character; the most splendid equipages in the Bois de Boulogne belong to her; the most extravagant toilettes are worn by her; she is the heroine of novels, the first character in dramas, the celebrity of the hour. She had not a more public or luxurious existence in ancient Athens or Rome than in the capital of France. Among the many attempts to idealise her situation and to throw a halo of poetic interest over her life, *La Dame aux Camélias* was the most brilliant and popular. The poesy of corruption having been carried to its apex, it was a good thought which entered the minds of MM. Barrière and Thiboust to take exactly the other side of the question, and to represent in hideous severity the worthlessness and venality of *Les Filles de Marbre*. The success was great, but it was the success of

<sup>1</sup> *Les Filles de Marbre*, by Barrière and Thiboust, was produced, May 17, 1853, at the Vaudeville, the same theatre which had witnessed the production of *La Dame aux Camélias* (see p. 241). Fechter played the leading part in both pieces. Selby's adaptation was produced at the Adelphi, May 22, 1854, with Leigh Murray in Fechter's part of Raphael, Madame Celeste as Marco, and Webster as the *raisonneur*, Desgenais.

reaction. Had there been no *Dame aux Camélias* the idea of *Les Filles de Marbre* would have been a platitude. Who would think of setting before us such a moral truism as that courtesans are venal, and that if sculptors ran after them, lavished their fortunes on them, forsook their ateliers for them, the consequences would be humiliation and ruin? The whole notion is preposterous. Raphael buys love, and then rants about want of heart in the woman who sells it; and we are expected to be interested in his infatuation, and to sympathise in his disenchantment! Unless we, too, had our hectic passion for the poetic courtesan, we could feel no sort of interest in seeing that mockery exposed.

What a pleasure it is to turn from such scenes of unhealthy sentiment to the genuine, eternal heart-interest of honest emotion, such as those agitating

### LA JOIE FAIT PEUR,<sup>1</sup>

which was played for the first time on Wednesday [May 24], at the French Theatre, with Régnier, Madame Allan, Mdlle. Fix, in their original parts, and Mdlle. Luther in the part so charmingly played by Mdlle. Dubois. This great little piece is a triumph of Art and Acting. Out of a subject so simple as the grief of a family for a young man supposed to be dead, the joy felt at his return—joy so great that it brings terror with it, lest it be *too* great, and therefore requires most delicate ingenuity to prepare the mind for its reception—for this, and this alone, is the subject of the piece—Madame Emile de Girardin has constructed a work

<sup>1</sup> Produced at the Théâtre-Français, February 25, 1854. Lewes adapted it for the Lyceum under the title of *Sunshine through the Clouds*, and it was produced June 15, 1854. Madame Vestris made her last appearance on the stage in the part of the mother, on July 26. Régnier's part was played by Frank Matthews.

of Art full of minute details, full of pathos and of laughter, every sentence vibrating on some chord of common experience, so that from first to last the spectator is agitated with emotions, powerful because true, and true to almost universal experience. To keep thus within the limits of everyday reality, and yet by force of Art to keep the interest of the audience, not simply above the level of trivial reality, but up to the very height of excitement, such as only profound passions usually attain, bespeaks in the authoress a dramatic power excelling that of all her contemporaries. Madame de Girardin's wit, fine observation, tact, and taste, are familiar enough to all readers of French literature, and have been several times lauded in these columns; but although she had in previous pieces shown herself competent to theatrical success, it was reserved for this little act to show that she possessed the *dramatic* faculty, in the highest sense of that term. I recommend every student of dramatic literature very attentively to analyse this piece. I recommend every lover of a finely-acted drama, and of a drama worthy of being finely acted, to go and see it.

I said it was a triumph of acting, as well as of writing; and having paid my tribute to Madame de Girardin, it is right that the praise should be shared by Régnier and Madame Allan.<sup>1</sup> Madame Allan, whom our public saw for the first time, made a profound impression in a part, the length of which is so insignificant that few of our leading actresses, probably not one, would have accepted it had they not seen what a great actress can do in the way of supplying by her art the eloquence which lies, indeed, in the situation, but which the author has left to the actor. The part consists of two situations and two feelings; the

<sup>1</sup> See Note, p. 93.



art of the actress consists in relieving the monotony by calling upon the variety which nature herself creates in emotion. But unless this emotion, and these varying shades of feeling, be truly discriminated, and nicely felt, unless the actress abandon herself to the passion of the part, and throw aside all traditional stage language of passion, it will become monotonous or a caricature. It is made a complaint against me that I am difficult to please; but I have twice seen *La Joie fait Peur* with the unmingled delight and admiration for Madame Allan and Régnier which a boy feels the first time he goes to a theatre. I thought them simply perfect. As for Régnier, hitherto the admirable, now the *great* comedian, his admirers will scarcely know what to think of that mobility of genius which enables him to create such a type as that of Noël. To those who remember, and all remember who have seen, the bright vivacity of his *Mari à la Campagne*, the reckless, restless, hard, metallic sharpness of his Figaro, the tempered buffoonery of his Scapin, the daring cowardice of his Hector in *La Bataille des Dames*—to those, in short, who remember Régnier in any of his multiform characters, this old, shambling, affectionate servant, so full of *bonhomie* and pathos, will seem almost an impossibility. There is nothing of Régnier in it, except the voice, the eye ("*j'ai quelquefois l'œil très brillant*"), and that finesse of observation, both of moral and physical details, which forms the basis of the art of acting. I have no space to enter into minute criticism, but I would briefly note, in conclusion, the rare power Régnier exhibits over what I sometimes call the *secondary emotions*—those, namely, which occur during the subsidence of a passion, like the wide-stretching circles on the surface of a lake into which a stone has been thrown. This is a point in which actors mostly fail. Observe

Régnier in that situation when his young master, supposed to be dead, stands before him. Into the space of a few seconds he has to crowd a variety of hurrying emotions, which end with his sinking almost lifeless in the arms of his master. The situation is a strong one, and there is no fine actor who would not make a great effect with it. But the point where actors mostly fall short, and where Régnier achieves consummate excellence, is in the dim awakening consciousness, and in the calmer tremblings which agitate him still, although the agitation is *subsiding*. To illustrate my meaning by a directly opposite example: observe Charles Kean, or Brooke, or Anderson, or any of the tragedians, who do *not* ornament the British stage, observe them after a burst of terrific passion, such as that of Othello, Lear, or Macbeth—passion that would shake their very being to its centre, if really felt; and you will perceive that the violent words once uttered, the stage once “taken,” or the attitude struck, the applause which welcomes this burst has not ceased before these gentlemen are as calm and composed, both in expression and voice, as if they had ordered “cutlets for one,” instead of calling upon the Powers of Hell to aid them in their vengeance! I have seen Charles Kean foam at the mouth one moment, and the next be as placid as a parish clerk. When you see Régnier think of this.

Mdlle. Fix, who played her original part—or say *sang* it, for her notion of acting seems limited to a certain rhythmical declamation—is a pretty woman, with a melodious voice. More I cannot say. Mdlle. Luther played the important part of Blanche with great *naïveté* and charm, though not equal to Mdlle. Dubois, who plays it in Paris. Altogether it is a great success, and the audience—“strange, yet true”—was enthusiastic.

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